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A RHETORICAL ASPECT OF EDGAR ALLAN POE'S SHORT FICTION:
A READER RESPONSE APPROACH

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
James Philip Lehan

June 1995

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Approved by:


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May 16, 1995
Date

ABSTRACT

A review of fifteen short stories by Edgar Allan Poe reveals that the rhetorical techniques used by the author have the potential to have a persuasive effect on the critical reader with regard to how such a reader views people in general, particularly the reading public for whom Poe would have to write.

Writing in the first person, Poe is often closely identified with the protagonist, a view accepted by several critics. Poe's protagonists are characters with whom the reader easily identifies because Poe's antagonists are characters the reader instinctively dissociates with. This identification/dissociation effect on the reader is achieved using rhetorical devices such as phonetic manipulation, the use of metaphors, and the treatment of character. Analysis of these rhetorical devices are juxtaposed with the ideas of Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction, regarding his views on creating and reinforcing beliefs, and Wolfgang Iser from The Implied Reader, considering his thoughts about the discovery of meaning in fiction through the negation of certain norms.

Poe felt that imaginative thinking was the highest form of intelligence. Poe's critical readers experience a series of characters whose imaginations allow them to prevail over antagonists whose lack of imagination leads to their downfall. While Poe initially wrote for the entire reading public, he would eventually discover that part of his audience, those he referred to as having "critical taste" was not large enough to support him. Poe felt he was forced by the reality of his poverty to write down to the public's intelligence level, creating a dislike in Poe toward that part of his audience he euphemistically referred to

as having “popular taste”, and he seldom passed up an opportunity to show what he thought of this part of his audience. Poe’s writings demonstrate that early in his career, Poe, the writer, tolerated the reading public, confident he could demonstrate his genius. After years of frustration, his writings show that he could not understand people and viewed the reading public as an unruly mob, incapable of thought, unworthy of sympathy, consideration or even comment other than ridicule. In his stories, Poe as protagonist struggles in a world full of people who he felt would never be able to appreciate his talents.

The central issue in this thesis is to demonstrate how Poe’s writings reveal his ever increasing frustration, his evolving attitude, and the various rhetorical devices he uses to convey his feelings to his fewer, more erudite readers, those Poe referred to as having “critical taste”. I am suggesting that Poe’s rhetorical devices and techniques not only allow, but may actually coerce the critical reader who may have overly romantic or optimistic views of human nature and people in general, into viewing people as Poe did. A thorough and chronological reading of Poe’s short fiction may very well influence such a reader to identify with the superior persona Poe presents as narrator or writer, and to respond to the situations he presents of fear, frustration, isolation and alienation, thereby influencing the reader to understand and perhaps even embrace Poe’s assessment of the reading public, if not people in general.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I THE EARLY YEARS.....	19
CHAPTER II THE MIDDLE YEARS.....	48
CHAPTER III THE LATE YEARS.....	70
CONCLUSION.....	81
WORKS CITED.....	84

Man you should have seen them kicking Edgar Allan Poe

John Lennon 1967

INTRODUCTION

In Poe and the British Magazine Tradition Michael Allen asserts:

All writers are interested in ways of reaching their readers, but a serious writer who is also a journalist is likely to be preoccupied with things like popularity, the nature of the audience, the building of reputations, the extent to which good writing can be widely successful. This is certainly the case with Poe. (3)

This statement does contain some truth but requires a great deal of qualification. Because there is no qualification, the remark contributes to the many myths about the enigmatic Edgar Allan Poe. Later in his work, Allen gives an account of the extreme circumstances that forced Poe to make certain commercial gestures.

Nevertheless, Poe vilifies Dickens, who attempted to make his writing palatable to the masses (not necessarily to forward his career so much as to spread his message), earning Poe's vilification. Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" shows how he felt about the kinds of lengthy novels Dickens churned out to satisfy the reading appetite of those Poe referred to as having popular taste.

If any literary work is too long to be read in one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression-- for, if two sittings be required, affairs of the world interfere, and every thing like totality is at once destroyed. (Mossman 1081)

Poe wrote primarily for himself and a few imaginative, more erudite readers capable of understanding aspects of the human condition Poe considered to be profound. My feeling is that Poe's use of vocabulary, anagrams, linguistic manipulations and constant use of phrases from obscure languages, were intended to impress, thereby affecting, a more erudite

audience and to please himself, and not the general public.

An understanding of Poe's dual audience is imperative before understanding his attitude about his audiences. In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe states he never loses sight of the fact that he is composing for "the popular and critical taste" (Mossman 1081). His stories contain such sensational elements as ghastly murders that might appeal to the popular taste. Sensationalism helped ensure publication and a modest income for Poe. However, I would argue, Poe cared little about this part of his audience, a vast majority of his readers by the way. Poe felt those readers of "popular taste" lacked the imagination needed to be affected by his work. In private correspondence, as well as in his fiction, he often referred to them as the "mob, vermin" and "rabble" (1017).

The rhetorical devices Poe used were meant to affect those "of critical taste." These are the readers Poe was, at least initially, writing for and who possessed a vivid imagination, something Poe felt was the highest form of intelligence. In "Mellonta Tauta" Poe writes, "Investigation has been taken out of the hands of the ground moles and given, as a task, to the true and only true thinkers, the men of ardent imagination" (1123). These are readers whose imaginations might allow them to be affected by the images and emotions he presents in his fiction, leading them to recognize and perhaps embrace Poe's increasing distaste for "the many." Poe felt this smaller audience was at least large enough to support his own periodical. He was wrong and in his later years gave up on reaching anyone and wrote primarily for himself.

Throughout his career one can see the conflict between the pure artist and the starving writer in Poe. His occasional lapses from his ideal as an artist,

which was to create simply to satisfy the need to create, were basically a result of Poe's destitution and not so much an attempt to reach his readers. While Poe certainly attempted to reach his popular audience, he did so not to affect them as much as to entertain them, as well as ensure publication. The point Allen doesn't seem to fully appreciate is the fact that motivation determines whether a gesture is an attempt to reach an audience or an attempt to fill one's stomach, and this distinction is vital before an attempt to determine Poe's attitude toward his larger audience, or even people in general, is made. Only with this in mind can one see how Poe's stories may effect those of critical taste, those of ardent imagination, to identify with the superior persona he presents by relating to the frustrations of Poe's narrators.

I would like to expose a certain rhetorical effect, and the devices used to achieve that effect, that the reading of Poe's short fiction may have on such a reader. The effect is such that some of these readers may even come to share Poe's opinion about people in general. In "Mellonta Tauta" Poe writes, "When one has nothing to do, then is the time to correspond with one's friends" (1118). Poe was initially amused by the reading public and tolerated it. Without indicting all readers, or even all people, eventually Poe became abusive and vindictive towards the public in general, held them in contempt, and found them unworthy of comment, save for ridicule.

Poe conveys his attitude about both his audiences through his short fiction. My opinion is that at least one of Poe's intended effects is to persuade his few, more erudite readers to share his views of people in general. The reading public ultimately becomes his subject matter, even in the works that are dubiously, but conveniently thought of as tales of horror. In order to

understand Poe's attitude about the many, the less imaginative, and how this attitude manifests itself, a thorough, chronological reading of Poe's short stories is needed. To take an isolated work and search for such revealing elements as word choice, modifiers and character description would be looking at something out of context. Poe's attitude cannot be confirmed from a single work any more than an athlete can be evaluated by a single performance.

Before examining just how this attitude manifests itself in Poe's short fiction, we must justify searching for it where we do; that is, in the rhetoric in Poe's fiction. Numerous scholars think one is justified in looking for rhetorical elements in fiction. Jim Corder says in his essay "Studying Rhetoric and Literature":

If people want to believe that rhetoric is always and only a tradition of instruction in persuasive public discourse, I'll be sorry but I'll not be bound by them . . . I'll be content here to say that rhetoric can come to literature effecting both particular and narrow avenues for entrance into literary study and a wider vision that embraces literature. (Tate 332)

Other scholars find it impossible to separate literature from rhetoric. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberd appreciate the inseparable tie between literature and rhetoric, writing, "literature frequently makes use of persuasion and argumentation . . . rhetoric, in short, has often been identified with literature" (912).

Kenneth Burke's approach, considered radical in his 1929 book Counter Statement says, in the words of Bizzell and Herzberd, "Literature is unequivocally a form of persuasive discourse, governed, therefore, by rhetoric" (913). In the same book, again when speaking of Burke, Bizzell and Herzberd say Burke felt that, ". . . the study of rhetoric . . . is precisely what is needed to

understand the effects of literature . . . literary forms are best understood by their effects on readers . . . ” (989). The rhetoric that allows the critical reader to be affected as a result of a stimulated imagination is precisely where our attention should be focused. Since Poe felt that the effect on the reader was “immensely important” when composing, giving it primary consideration, certainly there must be several rhetorical devices used by Poe to achieve this effect.

Generations later, this literature/rhetoric alliance is given even more credence in Wayne Booth’s The Rhetoric of Fiction. Booth argues that all forms of literature are discourse aimed at some kind of audience and that some critics should “. . . examine the techniques by which the author persuades the reader to accept the fictional world and the author’s ever present judgment about it” (Bizzell and Herzberg 913). Through Poe’s fiction, he does indeed make judgments about that larger part of his audience, “the many”. What may be possible is that Poe’s use of rhetorical devices can persuade those few critical readers to accept Poe’s judgment about the many.

Sharing Booth’s views on rhetoric and fiction is Richard Weaver. In “Language is Sermonic”, he writes, “Every use of speech, oral or written, exhibits an attitude . . . Every utterance is an attempt to see the world in a particular way and to accept the values implicit in that point of view” (1042). This implicit point of view, about those of popular taste and how it is conveyed, is exactly what we will be looking for in the short fiction of Edgar Allan Poe. Considering these views on rhetoric and fiction, it seems safe to view rhetoric as implicit to all language.

In “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe writes,

. . . the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking

events to form merely the basis of his narrative -- designing, generally, to fill in with description, dialogue, or authorial comment, whatever crevices of fact, or action, may, from page to page, render themselves apparent. (1080)

Since Poe claims to fill his work with authorial comment, the wide variety of characters he created (from all walks of life) would indicate the presence of some kind of comment on people in general, and not just the reading public. Very simply, Poe divided the reading public and people in general into those of critical and popular taste. Since Poe felt so strongly about imaginative thinking, he must have meant that those few critical readers had an imagination, brought it with them to what they were reading, and were able to assign meaning to, and respond to, thereby being affected by the various rhetorical devices Poe employed.

Those of popular taste were simply those readers who read only for entertainment, and Poe often gave them the sensational subject matter they preferred. Certainly there is some correlation between formal education, including the ability to read, and the development of one's imagination. But formal education, including the ability to read, are not necessary to be an imaginative thinker. In "Raising the Wind; Or Diddling," Poe explains the science of diddling as creative, if not unethical or even illegal ways of procuring money from the unsuspecting. Diddlers are not the most virtuous, and perhaps because of lack of opportunity, the best educated members of society, but Poe respects them because they survive by using their imaginations in ways the less fortunate must in order to compensate for life's inequities. "Your diddler is ingenious. . . He invents and he circumvents. Were he not Alexander, he would

be Diogenes. Were he not what he is, he would be a maker of patent rat traps or an angler for trout." (852).

Poe would have considered diddlers part of that smaller, imaginative part of the general public as surley as he would have considered some of his critics, editors and publishers as those of popular taste. People who praised or provided popular literature were as contemptible as those who preferred it because the providers apparently could not imagine the consequences of contributing to a culture that does not cultivate minds. At least that is how I see Poe rationalizing his contempt for all members of this larger segment of society.

Poe conveys his attitude about the general public, or those of popular taste by using a technique later recognized by Wolfgang Iser. Iser sees the starting point for the discovery of meaning in the negation of certain norms or social regulations, discovering through the fiction, a new reality, a reality different from that of the reader. The "norm" Poe negates is the belief that man is basically good, with a moral and intellectual capacity, a belief founded in Judeo Christian beliefs. This norm seemed apparent during Poe's life when one considers that Poe lived in the early 19th century in the fledgling democracy of the United States. This great American experiment was based on the belief that democracy could replace the traditional European aristocracies. Democracy depends on educated, thinking participants, capable of making informed decisions. By negating this norm, Poe is, in the words of Iser, "... placing it in a new context which changes its function, not insofar as it acts as a social regulation but as a subject of discussion which more often than not, ends in a questioning rather than a confirmation of its validity" (Iser XIII). There are several ways Poe negates the norm that people are basically intelligent or at least have

common sense and moral character, but his treatment of character requires most of one's attention.

The expression of attitude about his popular audience is evolutionary in nature and, because of this, Poe's career should be divided into three parts. His early career, conspicuous by its light humor, begins with his very first story, "Metzengerstein", published in January 1832. This early period involves six stories. It ends in May of 1839 with "The Devil in the Belfry". His middle period, marked by a darker humor, begins in August of the same year with the publication of "The Man That Was Used Up" and continues until May 1844 with "The System of Dr. Tar and Prof. Fether". The final stage of Poe's career, marked by an apparent despair of mankind and his loss of light humor, begins with "The Cask of Amontillado" in November of 1846 and continues until March of 1849 with the publication of "Hop Frog", just months before his death in October.

Such starting and ending points are not absolute. Each period has its own characteristics, and, as one might expect, these characteristics overlap at times. The dates provided are only to act as a general guideline to conveniently divide Poe's short seventeen year career.

in "Mellonta Tauta" Poe writes, ". . . the repression of imagination was an evil not to be compensated for" (Mossman 1121). One could wonder if Poe is speaking in this passage or if it is said by a character Poe created to serve as a dramatic point of view. I don't see that mattering because if Poe didn't want his critical readers to ponder the idea, he wouldn't have said it or allowed a character to say it, especially in a manner that appears to be a direct address. What affects the reader is the thought expressed, not necessarily who says it.

Poe's admiration of imaginative thinkers is shared by such contemporaries as Hawthorne who writes in "The Birthmark," ". . . The higher intellect, the imagination . . ." (Bohner 428).

Poe does not belittle critical thinking as a process or the results, but insists that the ultimate measure of intelligence lies with imagination. In "The Purloined Letter", Dupin has faith that Monsieur G_____, the Prefect of Parisian Police, is intelligent and thorough enough to detect a hidden document. Therefore, said document, considering the failure of the police to find it, may only be detected and procured using imagination and correctly assessing an opponent as having one.

An early understanding of Poe's attitude about imaginative thinkers is important because, as shall be seen later on, Poe's rhetorical devices can make a critical reader feel as Poe did, that most of the reading public is unworthy of comment other than ridicule. "When one has nothing to do, then it is time to correspond with one's friends" (1118). Such a feeling supports my assertion that his attitude is directed at the critical reader but it is about people in general. This attitude about most of his reading public with popular taste conveys itself throughout Poe's career.

The rhetorical effect of Poe's short fiction is not unlike what might be the effect upon a reader who regularly reads such periodicals as The Reader's Digest and William F. Buckley's National Review. Eventually, slowly but surely, a reader risks evolving into a conservative Republican. It seems unlikely a reader would develop a dislike of conservative views expressed in these periodicals and liberals would probably not continue a steady diet of these magazines. Those who are uncertain about their political beliefs might allow

such magazines to either plant new ideas or, as Booth would say, reinforce beliefs already there. Unaware readers might allow themselves to be coerced into believing things about which they may have previously been ambivalent. This is not unlike the way Poe's stories can work. They allow the critical reader who has an imagination to view the rest of the reading public, and people in general, the way Poe did, as simple-minded, easily manipulated and unworthy of attention. Poe's rhetoric allows the reader to imagine their own experiences in life that are similar to Poe's narrators and to recall the frustrations of having to deal with the likes of many of Poe's antagonists.

Just how easily the critical reader can be affected is debatable. Certainly it is easier to move a non thinker than a thinker. However, the rhetorical effect can work because the critical reader's real life experiences allow an association between the reader and narrator. The critical reader, no doubt, has at some time, had to deal with an arrogant know it all like Herman from "Von Jung the Mystific." The critical reader doesn't see Poe the writer or a character created by Poe; they see themselves. They experience the same frustrations and are thereby affected.

When reading Poe's work, one might do well to consider what Booth says in "The Rhetorical Stance" when referring to rhetoric as the art of persuading,

It presupposes that one has a purpose concerning a subject. In order for an author to change our minds about this subject, he can do so only if he knows more about the subject than we do, and if he then engages us in the process of thinking and feeling it through. (Tate and Corbett 156)

Poe's short fiction does engage the critical reader in the process of thinking, especially about Poe's apparent authorial comments about people in

general. Poe's rhetoric invites the imaginative reader to see through the obvious Blackwood characteristics and realize that Poe is almost incapable, for any extended period of time, of writing without commenting on the reading public with popular taste.

Of paramount importance here is a brief history of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, a highly successful British magazine, and the brainchild of William Blackwood. Blackwood's formula was primarily elitist:

It retained the air of exclusiveness and authority which had characterized the Reviews; it incorporated the curious and esoteric learning which was a feature of the more respectable older miscellanies like the Gentlemen's; but it fused these elements into a more relaxed, personal, and intimate ethos which permitted the inclusion of more blatant sensationalism, literary gossip, and fiction for the less erudite reader. (Allen 23)

Blackwood's appealed to a few imaginative members of the reading public, but primarily to the rabble, a term Poe would often use toward the end of his career (Mossman 1117), which was unable to appreciate anything profound. The magazine was very popular, and Poe, having spent several years in England as a boy, was undoubtedly exposed to it.

Allen apparently feels Poe was greatly influenced by Blackwood's, particularly those stories displaying sensationalism, such as "Loss of Breath" and "Morella". I believe Allen is wrong to say Poe was greatly influenced by the Blackwood's style. The word "influence" might allow one to imagine a writer who liked or appreciated certain aspects so much that the author copied them. One would find it difficult arguing that Poe's fiction lacks sensationalism. Many of Poe's works actually seem to be a paradox of the Blackwood's style. Where Allen errs is by failing to recognize the fact that whatever sensational

(Blackwood's) characteristics Allen may see may not be the result of the magazine's influence on a young writer, but the result of the influence of poverty on a hungry writer. It is curious to see this weakness in Allen's otherwise credible book when Allen himself quotes Poe's own definition of the Blackwood's formula.

You ask me what does this nature consist? In the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful colored into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical. (Allen 30)

When juxtaposed with Poe's "The Signora Psyche Zenobia", subtitled "How to Write a Blackwood's Article", Poe's feelings about sensational writing are apparent. He loathed it; he was not influenced by it. In "The Signora Psyche Zenobia", Poe satirizes the Blackwood's style. Signora Psyche Zenobia is a corresponding secretary to an organization known as the "Philadelphia, Regular Exchange, Tea, Total, Young, Belles, Letters, Universal, Experimental, Bibliographical, Association, To, Civilize, Humanity" (Mossman 499). This title is given to Psyche Zenobia by a Dr. Moneypenny. The implication seems clear that financial gain is the primary concern of the Blackwood's Magazine. The acronym of the organization is P.R.E.T.T.Y.B.L.U.E.B.A.T.C.H., a single letter away from Pretty Blue Bitch, leaving little doubt about Poe's feelings of those who wrote for such periodicals. Poe goes on to have Psyche Zenobia admit that the paper is "... characterized less by depth than buffoonery. They were all whipped syllabub" (499). When referring to an article in the association's magazine titled "Confessions of an Opium Eater", the article is described as "... a nice bit of flummery, and went down the throats of the people delightfully. They would have it that Coleridge wrote the paper--but not so. It was composed

by my pet baboon, Juniper, over a rummond of Hollanders and water" (501). So when referring to the Blackwood's style, I mean those aspects aimed at the tastes of those of popular taste, the less erudite, unimaginative reader. Such aspects of a story would today get the attention of The National Enquirer. My opinion is that Poe, at this early stage in his career, November 1838, is trying to tell his critical audience that he is above all that or would like to be.

Whether the critical reader sees the narrator as Poe the writer, or Poe the person, or even a character created by Poe to serve as a dramatic point of view, the effect on the critical reader is the same. Signora Psyche Zenobia is characterized as foolish. Poe appears to be employing phonetic manipulation here. Psyche, of course, means mind, and Zen refers to the Japanese Buddhist teachings about enlightenment through intuitive insight. But combined with phobia, a fear of something? Is the implication that she and the people she represents, those who provide and demand her sensational type of literature, are afraid to enlighten their minds? Such rhetorical devices would not allow the critical reader to associate with Psyche Zenobia. The critical reader would relate to the narrator whether is be Poe the person, Poe the writer or a character created by Poe.

Before beginning to search further for Poe's rhetoric in his short fiction, it is imperative to understand what motivated Poe to write in the first place. According to Poe, who is supported by such scholars as Wayne Booth, true artists don't care what their audiences think; they are concerned only with expressing themselves through their art. "True artists . . . take no thought of their readers. They write for themselves" (Booth 89). For Poe, becoming wealthy was seldom a primary concern. The bitterness that was starting to grow in Poe was

a result of the realization that if he were going to remain true to his art, then simply supporting himself was going to be difficult. Poe was concerned only with earning enough money to support himself; he had no desire to become wealthy if it meant writing down to the intelligence level of the reading public.

If all this was so, then why, one might ask, all the concern about the few and the many, those of critical and popular taste? There is no kind of ironic need to negate himself as a writer as one could suggest. All the concern is really authorial comment and in "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe writes that other than description and dialogue, authorial comment is what fills in the basis of his narratives (Mossman 1080).

Repeatedly Poe expressed the insignificance of money to several of his friends. In Chiver's Life of Poe, editor Richard Beale Davis claims, "... that Poe expressed himself more freely to his friends than to his reading public is natural and actually is indicated by almost every biographer" (39). Chivers calls Poe's letters "the most natural--truer revealers of his heart" (39). As early as June 1835, in a letter to Thomas Willis White, publisher of The Southern Literary Messenger, Poe states, with regard to accepting a position as assistant editor, "... I would gladly accept it, were the salary the merest trifle" (Thomas, Dwight and Jackson 158).

Poe's attitude toward wealth never changed. In May of 1842, tired of seeing literary hack work published because it would sell, Poe sought an opportunity to work in Washington. A friend of his, fellow poet Frederick William Thomas, appeared to be in a position to help Poe by speaking on Poe's behalf to Thomas's friend Robert Tyler, the President's son. Although a position never did go to Poe, in a letter to Thomas on May 25, 1842, regarding the matter, Poe

writes, "If the salary will barely enable me to live, I will be content" (Harrison, Vol. 1, 110).

Why then did Poe write if it wasn't for wealth? Popularity and reputation did mean something to him, but not if they came at the price of compromising his art. Certainly Poe occasionally gave his popular audience the sensational stories they preferred. But this does not indicate Poe cared about his audience; it indicates he cared about eating. Poe is not inconsistent with Booth. Poe wrote primarily for himself and a few imaginative readers.

Competition for readers was high among the numerous newspapers and periodicals available, and, to an editor, profit is always the bottom line. This compromising of literary ideals infuriated Poe and may very well be the primary catalyst that changed his personality to something perceived by the public as madness. In 1845 in "The Imp of the Perverse", writing in an apparent direct address Poe writes, "Had I not been thus prolix, you might either have misunderstood me altogether, or, with the rabble, you may have fancied me mad" (Mossman 1059).

Selling out for commercial purposes was something Poe loathed even though there were times when starvation forced him to do so. In a letter to F. W. Thomas (exact date missing but probably summer of 1941) Poe writes, "It is a hard thing to be poor--but as I am kept so by an honest motive, I dare not complain . . . To coin one's brain into silver, at the nod of a master, is to my thinking, the hardest task in the world" (Harrison, Vol. XVII, 93-4). Poe's honest motive was to remain an artist.

Apparently, Poe found it difficult to compromise his artistic ideals and the masters referred to would appear to be the editors and publishers who decided

what would be printed solely on the basis of what would sell with little regard to artistic merit. Poe's battles with his editors and publishers is well documented, and perhaps a topic for another time and place. But certainly Poe would have thought of his own antagonists in his profession as part of the popular taste. Those who cater to the popular taste were as contemptible as those who demanded their product. Poe probably felt his critics simply could not imagine the ramifications of a culture that does not cultivate minds. At least that's how I see Poe rationalizing his including his critics among those of popular taste. Imagining Poe's frustration should not be difficult and this is only 1841. Imagine what his attitude would be several years later.

Poe's attitude about these masters just referred to is unambiguously expressed in a letter to Dr. Thomas Chivers in 1842 regarding Poe's failed attempts to get an epic poem by R. B. Harne published. Poe's attitude is quite clear; he writes,

I have taken this book to every respectable publisher in the city, and not one of them is willing to take it upon himself the responsibility of publication. Here is a work which is, at best, five hundred years in advance of the age, and yet I can not get a publisher for it here in America. But if it were a book of romance, full of absurd probabilities, bad grammar, and wanting in every other thing necessary to make it a book at all, I could find a publisher at every corner. But here is a work superior even to Milton's Paradise Lost, which I do not ever expect to see published in America. There is not a publisher in American that deserves even the name of bookseller. (Chivers 41)

While this passage surely contains hyperbole, it certainly shows the growing frustration in Poe. Poe was after what he perceived as truth regardless of who was able to understand it, and the truth he is exposing is that in his opinion the reading public, or people in general, are incapable of understanding anything profound. This is the norm Poe's fiction negates, the

kind of negation that Iser says leads to the discovery of meaning in fiction.

In his "Philosophy of Composition" Poe is clear about stating that the pursuit of some kind of truth is the purpose of short fiction. His criticisms support this point repeatedly. His review of Legends of a Log Cabin in The Southern Literary Review in December 1835 says that although the book has some glaring faults, he likes it because "... the fate of M. Girand ... is related with the air of unvarnished truth so apt to render even a silly narrative interesting" (Harrison, Vol. I, 121).

It seems axiomatic, then, that this attitude of bitterness toward the reading public, the subject he never seemed to stop commenting about, is an important truth to be found in his fiction. At task is to examine those devices that could affect the reader in such a way as to discover this truth. Early in his career Poe knew that very few people would be able to understand him, but even the possibility of a small audience of imaginative and critical readers was enough to sustain him and his dreams of reaching a few of the reading public. Only late in his career would he discover that the reading public contained only a very small number of imaginative readers.

My contention is that a thorough evaluation of Poe's rhetoric reveals on each occasion that Poe made a concession to that larger part of his audience, his contempt for himself for having to do so manifests itself, often in his treatment of character. This will be seen more clearly in "Von Jung The Mystific" and "The Cask of Amontillado," and it is precisely why one cannot separate rhetoric from literature. When we look at any one of Poe's stories, we must also consider what was going on in his life prior to the story's publication. Only then can his attitude be fully appreciated. Only then, after juxtaposing his rhetoric

with events in his life, will this truth, this attitude, be ascertained. This is what Jim Corder means when he says:

When we take up literary study, I am suggesting we are taking up rhetoric. We are called to move into and through literary works, to authors and their ways of thinking into their views of the world, through their views of the world into their premises and needs . . . We are obliged to examine authors' ways of taking their world in a particular way and stationing themselves in a particular place in regard to it, and to examine the relation between the authors and their various audiences, considering how and why they came together. (Tate and Corbett 337)

I am trying to demonstrate that Poe's rhetorical devices and techniques not only allow but actually coerce the critical reader who may have overly romantic or optimistic views of human nature and people in general into viewing people as Poe did. At the start of Poe's career, his humor would indicate his amusement, tolerance, and even hope for people. But by the end of his career, Poe's rhetoric seems to indicate he felt most people, even many with formal education, were little more than a wretched bipedal infestation that was, with few exceptions, incapable of thought. At least that is how I see Poe assessing most of the reading public, if not people in general.

Chapter I

The Early Years

January 1832 - May 1839

Throughout Poe's career his stories are conspicuous by their opening lines. Poe wastes no time getting right to the point and tells his careful readers a great deal in that all important, often lengthy, first sentence. Conveniently enough, as one searches for Poe's attitude about the reading public as expressed through his rhetoric, one can start with the first sentence of prose he ever had published, the opening line of "Metzengerstein", published in January of 1832. "But there were some points in the Hungarian superstition (the Roman term was *religio*) which were fast verging on absurdity" (Mossman 78). This parenthetical aside, or direct address to the reader is where Poe is trying for the effect he called "immensely important" (1081). Why remind the reader to equate superstition with religion and then call them absurd? Here is where the rhetoric starts to work. Only the truly imaginative, objective reader could fairly compare the world's religions with cultural superstitions and have the strength to see they may be soberingly similar. This does not mean one must abandon the belief in some kind of God or divine being. I am not certain Poe even did that, and I have vigorously pursued the matter. But perhaps the critical reader might consider the possibility that man's evolution may still be closer to the early stages of savagery than to that of a highly developed intellectual being.

Critical reader's should at least momentarily entertain such a thought because they are aware that many profound truths started out as blasphemous. Those first to realize the earth was not flat nor the center of the universe were met with deadly resistance. Poe's assessment of organized religion could make the critical reader wonder if people are superior because of a God who created him in his own image or if mindless superstition and senseless ritual is really what separates people from any of the higher forms of life.

Early in Poe's career this attitude about people is tempered by his belief that somewhere in the general population there was a small audience that could appreciate him. With the publication of "Mellonta Tauta", a decade later, he would realize this audience did not exist. In another direct address Poe writes, "Whether you get this letter or not is a point of little importance, as I write altogether for my own amusement" (1128).

Poe is also confused by his lack of success; the readers have judged him as a failure. This confusion was shared in a letter (December 1835) to fellow Southern writer and Southern Literary Messenger contributor, Nathaniel Beverly Tucker. Poe writes, when speaking of his own work, "Generally, people praise extravagantly those of which I am ashamed, and pass in silence what I fancy to be praiseworthy" (Thomas, Dwight and Jackson 183). The next story, "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" (October 1832) reveals this confusion more clearly.

At such an early stage in his career, Poe felt there was nothing wrong with writing popular adventure stories for profit, although he did not think it required any talent to write a popular and successful one. His positive review of "Peter Snook" in October 1836 demonstrates this. From Poe and the British Magazine Tradition, Allen quotes Poe as having written that if you can't become popular writing about life in the wilderness or life upon the ocean, ". . . a failure to achieve popularity is conclusive evidence of imbecility on the part of the author" (165).

In July of 1833 Baltimore's Saturday Visitor offered a \$50 prize for the best story submitted. Poe entered "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" and won. An adventure story about being shipwrecked at sea, it has mass appeal. But its

significance may lie in the fact that his rhetorical device, in this case a metaphor, suggests that early in his career Poe is fully aware of his relationship with his audience and what he thinks of them at this time in his life. Poe's stories are unable to get the public's attention save by use of the Blackwoods techniques. The story does have mass appeal and Blackwoods characteristics, proving only that Poe could write down to the reading public when necessitated by hunger. However, the story may be more accurately seen as an apt metaphor for the young artist, confident in his talent, realizing for perhaps the first time that no one else sees that talent. As a thinking being, Poe is alone among what seems to be the walking non-thinkers. The autobiographical nature of the opening paragraph suggests that "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" is not a tale of adventure, but a fearful plight of the man of genius. Poe is adrift among a sea of readers who fail to recognize him.

Like many of Poe's stories, "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" contains an allegory. The story may be about Poe and the people he must impress with his art--his audience, both readers and editors. If one can shed the superficial adventure story label, the metaphor aptly reveals Poe's attitude. After miraculously surviving a shipwreck at sea, the protagonist is hurled into the rigging of another vessel. The crew of the ship, as well as the captain, fail to see him no matter how conspicuous he tries to be. Initially he hides, confused by their looks. "I was unwilling to trust myself with a race of people who had offered, to the cursory glance I had taken, so many points of vague novelty, doubt and apprehension" (Mossman 138). The artist Poe is adrift in the sea of the literary world and he is not noticed. "Incomprehensible men! Wrapped up in meditations of a kind I cannot divine, they pass me by unnoticed . . . the

people will not see" (139). "M.S. Found in a bottle is important not only because of how it begins to move the reader, but also because it demonstrates Poe's confusion, as well as his optimism this early in his career.

As one might expect from a young, eager and talented writer, Poe makes a serious attempt to demonstrate his writing ability. Notice here Poe says they will not see and not that they cannot see. This is surely a sign of optimism on the part of Poe; he is sure he will make them see. "It is true that I may not find an opportunity of transmitting it to the world, but I will not fail to make the endeavor" (139).

At some point in Poe's career he certainly became aware that his opinions about writing and the reading public were diametrically opposed to any kind of eventual success on his part. This realization probably created an inner conflict so great that certain self-destructive tendencies may be seen in his writings. The propensity of Poe to use phrases in other languages (often obscure ones), and often without translation would indicate either a need to convince himself of his own superiority or a masochistic desire to make himself incomprehensible to his audience. The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket proves Poe could write for a magazine audience when he wanted, but there was no audience anywhere, especially in a commercial publication, which was linguistically literate enough to justify this tendency as a sincere desire to be understood. "The Man of the Crowd", and other stories, show Poe's confusion; his contempt will surface later.

Poe had published very little as of 1833. Much of his work had been rejected. "Ms. Found in a Bottle" appears to demonstrate that Poe will try to make a name for himself in spite of several early failures. "I had ventured upon

deck and had thrown myself down, without attracting any notice" (139). Later, the protagonist says, "About an hour ago, I made bold to thrust myself among a group of the crew. They paid me no manner of attention, and although I stand in the very midst of them all, seemed utterly unconscious of my presence" (140).

What seems clear is that Poe, the writer, has met his audience but he does not understand them. It is incomprehensible to Poe why people are the way they are. The narrator senses a struggle as he tries to enter their world of thinking. "I have just left the deck where I find it impossible to maintain a footing, although the crew seems to experience little inconvenience" (141).

What Poe may be doing with "Ms. Found in a Bottle" is providing a metaphor for feeling isolated, something every reader feels at some time in life. Perhaps this feeling of Poe's is a result of his being alienated from his stepfather, John Allen, who had remarried and left Poe without any of the significant inheritance he was expecting. Poe was only 24 in 1833 and still optimistic about future success, although later he would feel a different kind of alienation when the readers judged him a failure.

Regardless of what motivated Poe to present these feelings of isolation and loneliness, the reader experiences them no less. But there is also a feeling of frustration. The frustration of not being listened to is also a feeling most readers have experienced. Poe the writer may be realizing he won't be listened to by the reading public.

If the crew is seen as insensitive and uncomprehending, what then of the captain? Does the highest ranking member of the ship, in charge perhaps because of his critical thinking skills and experience, represent authorities who fail to recognize value, perhaps even some of Poe's editors who were, after all,

part of the reading public? "I have seen the captain face to face in his own cabin, but he paid me no attention" (141).

The narrator makes his presence obvious by standing right under the noses of the crew and captain; yet they fail to see what should be obvious. What Poe really does with this story, as far as his attitude is concerned, is show that people, even those in positions of responsibility, cannot recognize what is right under their noses. "Ms. Found in a Bottle" is a simple assessment of the public. Poe is, after all, only 24 at the time. If the reader relates to ". . . but I will not fail to make the endeavor" as a feeling of confidence, it may also create in the reader, a sense of superiority, or elitism.

Since Poe felt that imagination was the highest form of intelligence, he had to feel that only a few of his readers had an imagination. However, those that do possess the ability could be counted on to use it; I suggest the rhetoric forces them to. Poe stimulates the readers imagination as much by what he says as by what is left unsaid. This rhetorical device, as seen in the following example, is precisely where the effect on the reader can be found.

At the end of "Ms. Found in a Bottle", right before the ship perishes in a storm, the narrator says, "It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge -- some never to be imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction" (Mossman 142). By telling the imaginative readers they are heading toward some knowledge, but not revealing what that knowledge is, the reader is forced to imagine or create it. Whatever this knowledge is, it can not be revealed directly to the reader. As Booth says, readers can not be told; they must be shown. This feeling is shared by Michael Bell who says, when speaking of the work of Poe, "To express a thought in language may be to kill it"

(Bell 116). A thought is conveyed to the reader through Poe's characterization of the crew and captain, whose behavior is described by the narrator as "incomprehensible." As soon as the reader is told something is incomprehensible, or unimaginable (in this case the behavior of the crew and captain), the critical reader has two options, only one of which is acceptable. The reader can either admit there is something they can not comprehend, a reality the ego and imagination would not allow, or they can assign some kind of meaning to the captain and crew's "incomprehensible" behavior. Perhaps these rhetorical devices of telling rather than showing, the characterization of the crew and captain, and the author forcing the reader to imagine some kind of profound knowledge said to be present, all may lead the critical reader to conclude that, much like the protagonist on board, just communicating with people in a way they can understand is difficult at best.

Poe will continue to create characters whose lack of imagination and perhaps curiosity does not allow them to recognize what is apparent to the critical reader. Because of this inability, many of them suffer horrible denouements. I suggest that the reader would not associate with such a character. Who, after all, would readily admit to being unimaginative? Poe's characterization affects the reader in a way that leaves little room for sympathy.

By giving his antagonists this characteristic, the inability to recognize what imaginative readers would think is obvious, Poe denies these readers a chance to muster up even a modicum of sympathy, and starts to persuade the reader to see his antagonists as perhaps not very aware of the world they live in. Booth recognizes how this rhetorical effect works on the reader. "Any characteristic, mental or physical, or moral, which in real life will make me love

or hate other men, will work the same effect in fiction" (Booth 130).

The next story reviewed takes this persuasive process a step further. Published in June 1835, "Hans Phaall" is conveniently referred to as science fiction. What Poe appears to be doing is starting to make fun of people while exploiting a popular craze at the time--ballooning. Certainly the subject matter, ballooning, would be of interest to those who purchased the newspapers and magazines that kept Poe employed; without them he doesn't eat. James Edwards suggests that "Hans Phaall" was written only because Poe knew it would sell and it did. During the next 19 months Poe increased the circulation of the Southern Literary Messenger from 700 to 5000. But while "Hans Phaall" may be in some ways a commercial adventure on the part of Poe, his treatment of character and clever use of symbols suggests what he thinks of a system and the people involved who insist on publishing solely for profit. His feelings are expressed with ridicule.

Whatever thoughts Poe may have been trying to convey, he first takes aim at newspapers and popular journals of the time, and, by implication, the people who read and provide them. It is of course still early in Poe's career and his optimism about having his own periodical some day allows a light sense of humor. What could be more of a parody than a balloon in the shape of a dunce's cap covered with old newspapers, slowly lowering to earth and mesmerizing the crowd? Here is an early negation of the norm that people are intelligent. By using a symbol of stupidity, a dunce's cap, to attract the people, the norm is put into a context that in Iser's words, questions the norm's validity rather than confirming it.

Already seen is how Poe felt about the popular writing that made it to

print. Significantly, Poe uses a single modifier to describe the balloon covered with newspapers--"reprehensible". What then can the reader assume is Poe's attitude about people who are mesmerized by that which he thinks is reprehensible?

Indeed Poe's own criticism forces one to look at his own choice of words. In May 1835, in a review of Frances Anne Butler's Journal, Poe criticizes her for her apparent overuse of the word "dawdled" claiming she must be addicted to it in real life (Harrison, Vol. I, 22). A sense of fairness would allow this same criticism to be leveled against Poe himself when he so often uses polite terms early in his career and at the end conspicuously overuses the terms "mob, rabble, vermin" and "herd" to describe and define the public, and "reprehensible" to describe something that attracts the attention of the "many."

Not surprisingly, and very revealing in a symbolic way, is the fact that, as the balloon descends, becoming increasingly more captivating the closer it gets to the crowd, it never does come all the way down. Would not the careful reader wonder why and perhaps see this is an apt metaphor? As Poe makes concessions to please a mass audience, he too is getting closer to his audience. But the closer the narrator gets, the clearer he sees a crowd mesmerized by newspapers, and the more disillusioned he becomes. The balloon stops short of touching down and ascends away from the crowd. This is probably what the artist in Poe was pleading with him to do and it might suggest again that an internal struggle is growing inside Poe the writer.

In 1835 this conflict is just a spark, hidden by his humor. Poe must have been amused when the story created a mild sensation when a crowd took the story as fact, oblivious to the phonetic manipulation, a rhetorical device often

used by Poe. Read backwards, Phaall is pronounced, "laugh." The story was meant as a hoax. Apparently no one noticed this story takes place on April Fools day. Recognizing the phonetic manipulation would of course require imagination. In a few more years Poe will find little to laugh about. This spark of frustration will grow into a raging fire that will consume him, fill him with contempt, and drive him what some thought of as mad.

By the end of 1835, the young, fairly healthy, confident Poe starts to build a modest reputation from a few short stories in The Southern Literary Messenger. He had just secured employment as assistant editor to White, although he accepted the position only after John P. Kennedy failed to secure a teaching position for Poe. Poe had just become engaged to his cousin, Virginia Clemm, and the idealistic Poe was certain of some future success in literature. This faith was no doubt fueled by such comments as those of Petersberg Constellation editor Hiram Haines who called Poe's "Hans Phaall" "conclusive evidence of genius and talent."

Poe felt certain there was a market, perhaps small, but large enough to support an intellectually superior periodical. But at this point in his career Poe was only beginning to have to deal with what was to become a life long destructive battle--his dealings with editors, publishers, printers, the politics and inner machinations of the influential big city (particularly New York and Boston) literary circles who Poe believed valued loyalty, admired imitation and mediocrity, placed profit ahead of art, and demanded incessant compromises in the young Poe's work. Poe's attitude about those who own and control the presses is again marked by humor, and is vividly shown in the next story, "King Pest the First". One must be careful to remember that to Poe editors,

publishers and critics were still part of the general public: they just happened to be part of Poe's profession. Poe respected many in his profession but was at odds with what seems like many more. This is the way Poe felt about people in general, and in "King Pest the First" editors and publishers are just taking their turn under Poe's hatchet as he uses them to negate a norm about what motivates people.

Subtitled the story "A Tale With an Allegory" allows one to focus immediately on the most important rhetorical aspect of the story, the title. Poe tells his critical readers right away that the story explains an idea or moral principle and that the people and things in the story have a hidden or symbolic meaning. Once again, only the reader capable of imagining can assign meaning to things such as symbols and metaphors, and thereby come to some kind of conclusion. What might Poe's word choice and character description lead the reader to conclude? A closer look at the text is required.

King Pest and his cronies are the editors and publishers with whom Poe dealt, an interpretation supported by author J. R. Hammond (102). Poe is both Legs and Hugh Tarpaulin, the main characters in "King Pest the First". What needs closer attention is Poe's description of his allegorical self, Legs, as "serious beyond all attempts at imitation or description" (Mossman 220). Here is an example of direct address. The careful reader may see the author's request to look beyond the laughter. While Legs and Hugh try to drown King Pest and his cohorts in a vat of wine, Poe is being humorous and serious at the same time. Drowning in a vat of wine is hardly the most horrible way to die. Indeed, who among us doesn't know at least one hedonist who might even view such a denouement as a fantasy come true.

But the careful reader should notice Poe's serious feelings about this part

of the general public, editors and publishers, who more than the overall public, should know, appreciate, and demand quality literary work. Poe's feelings are revealed in his description of King Pest's habitat. It is early vintage Poe. The description is surely Poe's denigration of the world of the literary status quo. Only by being seriously intoxicated can Legs and High deal with the horror of the situation.

The air was damp. cold and misty. The paving stones . . . lay in wild disorder amid the tall, rank grass, which sprung up hideously around the feet and ankles. Rubbish of fallen houses choked up the streets. The most fetid and poisonous smells everywhere prevailed . . . While actual exertion became necessary to force a passage through frequent heaps of putrid human corpses. (222)

This description may suggest what Poe thinks of this section of his audience, the editors and publishers with whom he had to deal. This is the environment that sustains the big city literary status quo, one that breeds literary ineptness by demanding the artist abandon creativity and imagination in order to mass produce anything that sells. But how might this description affect the reader? This vivid description of King Pest's environment would repulse any reader capable of imagining being in such a place. The greater the reader's imagination, the more repulsive it would seem. This description should start a dissociation between the reader and King Pest (as well as the people the title of the story says the king must represent). This disassociation is later reinforced by the characterization of King Pest who is arrogant, dictatorial and incapable of negotiation, characteristics universally despised. The title of King Pest, while apparently demeaning, acts almost as a protective euphemism in light of his actual character.

The description of the allegorical editors is humorous enough, each

having some physical trait way out of proportion. But Poe's description of the last creature appears to be his thoughts about an anonymous editor who, perhaps because of nepotism, secured an influential position in spite of what Poe saw as his incompetence.

Fronting him, sixthly and lastly, was situated a singularly stiff looking personage, who being afflicted with paralysis, must to speak seriously, have felt ill at ease in his unaccommodating habiliments. He was habited, somewhat uniquely, in a new and handsome mahogany coffin. (225)

Poe is challenging the status quo here and laughing in the face of the literary giants of the publishing world. Legs must bend down to the table to be at eye level with King Pest only to "burst into a long, loud obstreperous roar of very ill timed and immoderate laughter" (226). This symbolic gesture may be an attempt to create a feeling of superiority in the reader who should already loath the likes of King Pest.

The pathetic group's response to Legs is not surprising. Poe had been told oftentimes in real life by some editor (White perhaps), "Know then that in these dominions I am monarch, and here rule with undivided empire under the title King Pest the First" (226). Poe would have to agree to commercial modifications to ensure his work's popularity. He knew as Legs and Hugh are told, "You shall be forthwith free either to proceed upon your way, or remain and be admitted to the privilege of our table, according to your respective and individual pleasures" (227).

In other words, Poe could resort to the Blackwood's characteristics or remain true to his art form. Legs' response is certainly the feelings of the youthful Poe who was uncomfortable with the idea of compromising his art for commercial success. "It would be a matter of utter impossibility" [sic] (227). A

melee breaks out and the protagonists escape after drowning King Pest.

The careful reader should be able to associate with Legs and relate to his feelings of frustration of having to deal with the likes of King Pest. But once again, something left unsaid is where Poe's rhetorical technique is found. When Legs says, "it would be a matter of impossibility," the reader is never told why, but is left to imagine or create a reason. The critical reader also notices there is no attempt at negotiation on the part of Legs, perhaps leaving the reader to conclude that dealing with the likes of King Pest is to be avoided. Attempts to enlighten would be a waste of time after considering that once greed, power and wealth invade the soul, the human condition seldom allows rehabilitation. I suggest this is a possible meaning a reader could assign to the allegory.

Once again Poe gives the reader a character one cannot feel sorry for nor identify with as well as a narrator who evokes sympathy. The wretched filth and swine-like behavior of the King coerces the reader to join Poe in laughing at the King, and at those whom the King represents. This is consistent with what Booth says about a characteristic in real life that makes one love or hate, which also works in fiction. Poe's use of language encourages a kind of mutually understanding relationship between the reader and the narrator where they almost become one for a while. Michael Bell's evaluation of Poe's use of language reinforces a recognition of this reader/narrator relationship.

The Poe reader, whatever meanings he may find in the language of the tales, must first confront that language itself: a language--including the symbolic discourse of image, character, and plot--apparently drained of significant relation. Before asking what this language means, the reader must ask how it means. He must ask what sorts of relation, beneath the mask of willful obscurity, it allows and encourages. (Bell 103).

Certainly most of the reading public would have been incapable of appreciating Poe's humor, and he knew that. Poe's purpose was probably self-gratifying, believing he was justified to fulfill the artist's need to create and/or comment. Poe clarifies this point later in "The Isle of the Fay,"

As a young man, Poe's attitude was understandable. But events of this year would act as a catalyst to inflame early feelings of frustration and anger in Poe. He felt he was being taken advantage of by the literary powers that be. Just before "King Pest the First" appeared in late September of 1835, The New York Transcript reprints "Hans Phaall" without ever identifying the author (Thomas, Dwight and Jackson 167). Also, in a letter to John Pendleton Kennedy dated September 11, Poe brings to Remington's attention what Poe sees as literary piracy. He writes, "Have you seen, 'The Discoveries of the Moon'? Do you not think it is altogether suggested by 'Hans Phaall'? I am convinced that the idea was stolen from myself" (168). It will still be a few years before Poe completely gives up hope and his idealism fades away. For now he still has the ability to laugh at those readers of popular taste. The most revealing aspect of his attitude is that it is still one of tolerance.

When Poe wrote "The Devil in the Belfry" (May 1839), he had yet to reach the point in his career where he could no longer tolerate the apparent inability of most of the general public to comprehend anything artistic or scholarly. But there is no doubt he held the masses in low esteem. In September of 1839, in a letter to Philip Pendleton Cooke, a Virginian poet with whom Poe corresponded during Poe's Philadelphia period, Poe wrote, "As for the mob--let them talk on. I should be grieved if I thought they comprehended me here" (Harrison, Vol. XVII, 53)..

While it may be possible, due to what might be seen as self destructive tendencies in Poe, to view Poe as the source of his own problems and his complaints about the publishers and reading public as his own rationalization, I disagree. Poe is realizing what Henry James would realize almost 50 years later when James referred to the reading public as “absolutely idiotic” (Felstiner, “Afterword”).

In another letter, Poe mentions “. . . artists not being appreciated by the vermin” (Wagenknecht, 106). Poe apparently felt this way about the man of the crowd for quite some time. In a review of some poems by Mrs. L. J. Sigourney, in The Southern Literary Messenger dated June of 1836, Poe says that a writer can easily become popular “. . . merely by keeping continually in the eye, or by appealing continually with the little things, to the ear, of the great, overgrown, and majestic gander, the critical and bibliographical rabble” (Literary Classics of the U.S. Inc., 874-5). What is important now is the fact that these negative terms have yet to show themselves in his short fiction.

In “The Devil in the Belfry”, Poe’s phonetic manipulation reveals a sense of humor that shows he is amusing himself at the expense of the masses. This is done without a single derogatory modifier. With tongue in cheek, Poe is clear about what he thinks of the general public. All the citizens look, act, dress, behave and eat the same in the finest place in the world, the Dutch borough of Vondervotteimittiss. While the name of this town is humorous, Poe’s phonetic manipulation is at the same time a derogatory comment about the citizens and the reading public. However, before Poe tells us about this place, in a direct address he lets the careful reader know that humor is not his intent. Truth is the subject, and Poe’s rhetoric seems to lead the reader to discover that this truth

may be about average everyday people--where his audience exists. In what Booth would point out as a direct address, Poe tells us,

No one who knows me will doubt that the duty thus self imposed will be executed to the best of my ability, with all that rigid impartiality, all that cautious examination into facts, and diligent collation of authorities, which should ever distinguish him who aspires to the title of historian. (Mossman 514)

Booth devotes several pages to direct address and its usefulness in revealing an author's attitude and how it is conveyed to the reader. In short, he says that most critics do not find it helpful. While the usefulness of direct address is debatable, one must examine closely what Booth says about it. I question Booth's understanding of Poe's rhetorical purpose because Booth cites Poe's direct address in "The Premature Burial," calling it boring, annoying, and useless in terms of strongly moving an experienced reader.

What Booth may not understand is that by July 1844 Poe had all but given up writing for any audience; by then he was writing about them. While the direct commentary may fail to move the experienced reader, Poe didn't care about moving the experienced reader at that point in his career because he believed there were very few of them worthy of impressing so Poe was writing primarily for himself. In that sense Booth may be correct. But direct commentary will move the experienced reader if the correct rhetorical devices are used to stimulate the imagination. Most of Poe's stories are metaphorical, and what could be more moving than the genius realizing no matter how brilliantly he demonstrates his genius, it will not be recognized or appreciated? The artist's talent might as well be buried if there is no one capable of understanding it. One of Poe's last stories, "Mellonta Tauta," shows that even posthumous

recognition held no value to Poe.

Even though Booth writes that when looking for an author's voice, ". . . we must erase all direct addresses to the reader" (Booth 16), he believes that it is extremely difficult to define what direct commentary actually is. Because some, but hardly all, of what I see as Poe's attitude is from his direct address, it is imperative to focus our attention on how Booth ends his first chapter "Telling and Showing" :

In short, the author's judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it, whether its peculiar forms are harmful or serviceable is always a complex question that cannot be settled by any easy reference to abstract rules. As we begin to deal with this question, we must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear. (20)

Direct address is one way Poe demonstrates his attitude. The fact that Booth recognizes the difficulty of determining whether direct address is harmful or useful allows the liberty of using it , especially when much of Poe's direct address is where his authorial comment lies. In addition, in chapter seven, "The Uses of Reliable Commentary", Booth says,

It is not surprising that critics have been tempted to discuss commentary--and usually to condemn it--as if it were a single thing which can be judged simply according to our general views of the novel. But it should prove worthwhile to abandon such a priori judgments and to look into some good novels to discover the effects commentary has, in fact, been used to achieve. (169)

Apparently, a skilled writer can use it effectively. Poe's direct address is often esoteric, but those few who comprehend often leave the direct address with their imagination stimulated, often by the negation of a norm that Iser discussed. The French Poet Charles Baudelaire, perhaps the most enthusiastic of Poe's

supporters, felt he understood Poe's ability to persuade, perhaps like no one else. Baudelaire understood the significance of Poe's direct address which Poe often uses to begin a story.

In his case every introductory passage quietly draws you in like a whirlpool. His solemnity takes the reader by surprise and keeps his mind on the alert. Immediately he feels that something serious is involved. And slowly, little by little, a story unfolds in which all interest depends on an imperceptible intellectual deviation on a bold hypothesis, on an imprudent dose of Nature in the amalgam of faculties. The reader, seized by a kind of vertigo, is constrained to follow the author through his compelling deductions. (Baudelaire 60)

Is not a "bold hypothesis" similar to negating a norm or social regulation?

While Poe's direct addresses are not the only place his rhetorical effect can be found, in some stories it is imperative to search there. "The Devil in the Belfry" is one of those stories. As far as Poe's references to the masses go, they are all positive, ". . . the people . . . the wisest inhabitants . . . the good burghers and the good people" (Mossman 518). He describes them as both handsome and intelligent. The good people of Vondervotteimittiss go about their business while a high steeple in the center of town chimes every hour and the citizen's very existence revolves around the clock. When a stranger comes along one day and at noon chimes the clock thirteen times, in sets panic. The people are not only confused but are distraught and simply don't know what to make of it. Their entire lives are disrupted and threatened by this event.

The critical reader may wonder why the average citizen becomes distraught when their simple routine is disrupted. Anything that is new or different is unconditionally rejected. "For this they assign the very good reason that they do not believe there is anything at all on the other side" (515).

Realizing something might exist on the other side would require thought.

Egocentrism is proportional to intellectual development. Infants are unable to conceive of the existence of something they cannot see. Most humans have never been able to believe that the earth is not the center of the universe and the only locale of life. Would a critical reader feel the average person is incapable of objectivity, displaying an infantile, over-evaluation of themselves, their country, their religion, and whatever other truths they have been sold?

The citizens of Vondervotteimittiss have three golden rules which conduct their lives: "That it is wrong to alter the good old course of things; that there is nothing tolerable out of Vondervotteimittis; and that we will stick by our clocks and cabbages" (515). It is interesting to point out here that the biggest concern of the good citizens, after knowing the time of course, is if there will be enough cabbage to eat. Poe uses the term "cabbage" eight different times (addicted?) including Kroutaplenty as a source of information. Apparently, if one can keep the public fed and get them to show up on time, one cannot expect more. Poe may well have been aware of what was said only a few generations earlier by Frederick The Great.

To desire to enlighten mankind is love's labor lost; indeed it is often a hazardous enterprise. One must be satisfied with being wise when one can be, and one must leave the common herd (a term Poe would use later) to its erroneous ways seeking only to prevent it from committing crimes which disturb the social order. (Barker 96)

Poe seems to feel that people were not inquisitive by nature and were unable to comprehend anything which contradicts, however unbelievably or ridiculously, what is perceived as ordinary. These are the people for whom Poe must write. These are also the people with whom the critical readers would not associate.

"What is the use in attempting to describe the terrible scene which ensued? All Vondervotteimittis flew at once into a pitiable state of uproar" (Mossman 520). The story is negating the norm that people have common sense and by now Poe is reinforcing the idea. Even a schoolboy would realize right away that thirteen chimes on a clock could only be the result of human error or mechanical failure, certainly nothing to get distraught over. The citizens however, just can't imagine what went wrong. Having a good imagination and common sense is certainly a desirable characteristic, something many readers would like to think they have. Perhaps these characteristics could be considered normal, or at least common. By giving the careful reader a series of characters who have no imagination or common sense, Poe is, in the words of Iser, "placing it in a new context." The effect on the reader is a result of the meaning the reader associates with the characterization of the citizens. The exact meaning assigned, if there is such a thing, may be unimportant because as Bell says, ". . . for lack of meaning, like meaning, is an effect, relying on assumptions about the reader, in this case, about his ability to comprehend" (Bell 106). Does it not then seem possible that the reader might imagine having to deal with their own real life citizen of Vondervotteimittis, allowing the reader to perhaps relive a frustrating time having to deal with someone who could not comprehend?

Around this time in Poe's career he became aware his talent may never be understood by the vast majority and to reach them, even for commercial purposes, would require drastic changes. Being forced to make these changes irritated Poe, and this irritation manifests itself in "Von Jung the Mystific" when Poe creates a character whose humiliation is encouraged by the reader.

While much, if not most of Poe's writing is blatantly autobiographical, none is more so than "Von Jung the Mystific." Von Jung was,

... about my height ... by no means handsome. The contour of his face was somewhat angular and harsh. The forehead was lofty and very fair; his nose a snub; his eyes large, heavy, glassy and meaningless. (Mossman 471)

In addition to the excellent self portrait we are told that Von Jung is, "... neither more nor less than one of those human anomalies now and then to be found, who makes the science of mystification the study and business of their lives" (471). This last bit of information is the most definitive. In "The Imp of the Perverse" Poe declares that, "There lives no man who at some period has not been tormented" (or delighted?), "... for example, by an earnest desire to tantalize a listener through circumlocution" (1058).

Certainly much of Poe's supposed madness might well have been enacted. In "The Gold Bug," Legrande finally admits that "... I felt somewhat annoyed by your evident suspicions touching my sanity, and so resolved to punish you in my own way, by a little bit of sober mystification" (836). This tendency, however, was not confined to what he wrote. George Graham quoted Poe as saying, "I believe that demons take advantage of the night to mislead the unwary--although you know I don't believe in them" (Wagenknecht 50). Even without the remarkable physical description, finding a main character with the author's trademark eccentricity suggests that Von Jung is Poe.

To demonstrate the personality and ability of Von Jung, an incident is recounted in which he makes a fool of a man called Herman. One must consider how nicely the German Herr Man fits with "er lasst sich nicht lesen" (it does not allow itself to be read) from "The Man of the Crowd". Herman was "

. . . an original in every respect--except perhaps that he was one of the greatest asses in all Christendom" (Mossman 473). Von Jung sets up his dupe by presenting him with a ludicrous and cryptographic book concerning the etiquette of the duel of which Herman is a self-proclaimed expert. Von Jung then waits for signs, ". . . from the general tenor of his conversation, that he had studied it with the deepest interest, and firmly believed it to be a work of unusual profundity" (478).

When Von Jung senses this and knows his opportunity has come, he is forced to drop his handkerchief to prevent anyone from seeing him laugh. He challenges Herman, a giant and renowned duelist, to a duel, solely to exult in his ability to manipulate Herman. Like Dupin recounting the chain of thoughts, Von Jung knows precisely how Herman will react. When Von Jung receives a note from Herman, he sends a reply without reading it. Ultimately, Herman cancels the duel rather than admit his inability to comprehend the nonsensical book presented to him by Von Jung.

In June of 1837 Poe is still amused at how easy it is to play with and control the simple minded, which to Poe would appear to be almost everyone. But what is most important is the fact Poe has given Herman a characteristic universally despised. Herman is a pretentious ass whose knowledge of dueling is virtually nonexistent. The significant passage concerning Poe and the reading public (and who else would Herman symbolize after being given a book he couldn't understand?), is when Von Jung must drop his handkerchief to avoid being detected laughing. Poe is a long way from being frustrated to the point of losing his sense of humor. He wouldn't dare embarrass his audience publicly, but this is because Poe felt in 1837 that there surely must be some kind

of literate audience out there just waiting for what he knew he could produce.

The effect on the critical reader is to relate to Von Jung and sympathize with his frustration while at the same time laughing and distancing themselves from Herman. This feeling of frustration that Poe creates continues the rhetorical process of influencing the critical reader to understand Poe's assessment of Herman and the people he represents--the reading public. The rhetorical effect lies in the title and what that title forces the critical reader to expect and then contemplate. The title says Von Jung is mystific, so the reader approaches the story expecting to see Von Jung perform something almost magical, or super human. He doesn't. This discrepancy between what the title suggests and what actually happens allows the reader to search for something mystific. To Herman, and by implication the people he represents, anything beyond the ordinary is mystific. Von Jung only appears to Herman to be mystific because Von Jung is so much smarter. To Herman, intelligence is as mystific or paranormal as witches. This idea is what the critical reader contemplates; intelligence in people is not part of the norm. Von Jung having to hide his laughter may show Poe's tolerance of this aspect of the human condition. Later, the joke will get old and one can see how Poe becomes vicious in his treatment of his antagonists.

As of June, Poe still held for himself the ideal of "Von Jung the Mystific" to seek no audience. True art, Poe always believed, was justified by doing no more than fulfilling the artist's need to create. In "The Isle of the Fay" Poe writes, "No more than any other talent is that for music susceptible for complete enjoyment where there is no second party to appreciate its exercise" (669). Poe was confident that his talent might yet be recognized. His impatience when

this did not happen led to a rapid degeneration in his humor which was at this point in his career, his basic style.

This degeneration is too linear to ignore. The light humor of Von Jung and "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" (1837-1839?) becomes mocking in "Signora Zenobia" (November 1838). His assessment of the residents of Vondervotteimittiss (May 1839) is marginally more humorous than vicious, and "The Man That Was Used Up" (August 1839) is thoroughly dark. At this point Poe gives up on humor; it won't sell.

Poe explored the dual self in "William Wilson" (October 1839), pondered "Instinct vs. Reason" (January 1940) and concluded that "The Man of the Crowd" *er lasst sich nicht lesen*. For Poe to be unable to fathom the thought processes of Man, he must have decided that people, at large, are even bigger fools than Herman, who was after all "one of the biggest asses in all Christendom". Waiting for his talent to be recognized was obviously an exercise in futility. Some critics feel, erroneously so in my opinion, that Poe needed a situation where his genius would be terribly conspicuous. As Joseph Krutch observed, "Poe invented the detective story in order that he might not go mad . . . Poe was a man of superior intellect, but he found it difficult to establish, so he was constantly attempting to demonstrate it" (Krutch 103). The solution was obvious to someone who appreciated the Blackwood's style. Simply invent the detective story and have your hero solve a gruesome multiple murder committed by an animal. By the time of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (April 1841) Poe is hungry enough to make commercial concessions, but that is still a year away.

I question what Krutch says about Poe desperately needing to

demonstrate his genius. If that were the case, why would Poe abandon such a commercially successful genre after only three attempts: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Purloined Letter" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget" which was not even fictional? While some may suggest it was due to Poe's possible self destructive tendencies, I submit they are wrong. My guess is that these stories, all of which deal with critical thinking and its process, quickly bored the author who already stated that imagination was a higher form of intelligence.

What now must be realized, after reviewing several of Poe's early works, is what his rhetorical devices have started to do. What Poe is doing, perhaps unintentionally at this point in his career, is what Wayne Booth calls "molding beliefs". Booth says,

... as a rhetorician, an author finds that some of the beliefs on which a full appreciation of his work depends come ready made, fully accepted by the postulated reader as he comes to the book, and some must be implemented or reinforced. (177)

Poe's characterization of Herman and the people of Vondervotteimittis might suggest Poe is implanting the idea that people are not very imaginative. In fact, most seem unaware of the world they live in. He does this by negating the norm (the rhetorical device espoused by Iser) that people are intelligent and capable of objectivity.

Most people are good at heart. Poe knew that. But that has little to do with imaginative thinking, something necessary to appreciate beauty and genius. Most of the reading public came to Poe indoctrinated with the belief that man was in many ways superior, or good and intellectual, an ideal found in Judeo Christian traditions.

Reading several of Poe's stories may allow a reader to question such

beliefs. No reasonably intelligent reader would see themselves as a citizen of Vondervotteimittiss, someone incapable of thought or imagination. No reader would identify with Herman, an arrogant braggart who ends up, in the eyes of Von Jung and the reader, as a ludicrous fraud. And no readers would see themselves as one of the multitude who await the descending of Hans Phaall while mesmerized by a symbol of stupidity, a dunce's cap. But the few critical readers would identify with the feeling of superiority as does Von Jung, because everyone is forced on occasion to deal with a pretentious person like Herman and delights in such a person's exposure and humiliation. These dupes get no sympathy from the reader.

Having characters in situations where they are made to appear as bumpkins certainly contributes to the effect of "molding beliefs". Once this process is started and sustained over several stories, and years, this process of persuasion goes a step further by giving the reader a series of characters in situations that are less humorous and more demeaning. This process of persuasion is by its very nature slow and will eventually require the reading of several more stories to reinforce this attitude. Poe will soon be creating antagonists who are idiots.

Of primary concern is the inner workings of Poe's antagonists, and how they think and behave (i.e. Herman), and the readers' response to the feelings Poe so skillfully creates. This is precisely where Booth says it is to be found. ". . . the author's presence will be obvious on every occasion when he moves into and out of a character's mind" (17).

Poe is again consistent with Booth in that Poe, with rare exceptions, seldom comes right out and tells his imaginative readers what he thinks of

people in general; he shows them. What else is one to think when one sees the actions of Herman or the people of Vondervotteimittiss? Can one assume this attitude or belief or opinion is even present in the first place? Booth says it is always there.

In short, the author's judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it . . . we must never forget that although the author can to some extent choose his disguises he can never choose to disappear. (20)

The end of 1840, with the publication of "The Man of the Crowd", makes the convenient dividing point between Poe's early and middle career. The story is significant because his light humor is gone although his derogatory references to the masses have yet to begin.

Chapter II

The Middle Years

December 1840 -- May 1844

"The Man of the Crowd" (December 1840) will be used as a dividing point between Poe's early and middle periods because it was the first story Poe had published in almost a year. Poe's previous story, "Peter Pendulum," was published the previous February. Such a long time between stories was rare for Poe.

Several years were required for Poe to realize there was no market for his poetry and after seven years of short fiction, much of it humorous, that too didn't sell. At this point Poe is confused about his audience. "The Man of the Crowd" makes this confusion apparent. While Poe is a bit uncertain about the reading public, he is still confident of reaching some small sector of the reading public with his own periodical some day. As late as June 1840 Poe is distributing copies of Prospectus of the Penn Magazine To Be Edited by Edgar Allan Poe (Moss 90).

"The Man of the Crowd," among other stories, shows Poe's confusion; his contempt will surface later. The narrator is sitting in a coffee house watching several people come and go during their daily routines. There are no derogatory references to these people. They are in fact "many individuals of dashing appearance" and "noblemen, merchants, attorneys and tradesmen", and he calls them all "decent" (Mossman 649). While the narrator is polite when referring to them, he is hardly impressed. He says of them that they are "overwhelmed with confusion . . . they did not greatly excite my attention" (648). Poe is reluctant to give his popular audience what he knows they want (his next story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" would solve that), and he appears to be unimpressed with them.

After a while, the narrator focuses his attention on an individual and

follows him around London. "At no moment did he see that I watched him" (652). This indicates that Poe is aware of his readers. "He entered shop after shop, pricing nothing, spoke no word and looked at all objects with a wild and vacant stare. I was now utterly amazed at this behavior" (652). All this man is doing is wandering aimlessly with no goal, direction or reason. These are the people whom Poe must reach and who will ultimately decide what gets printed and what doesn't. Poe's confusion is evident when he says "... but on the whole I was unable to comprehend the waywardness of his actions" (653).

Poe had already let his readers know how he felt about imaginative thinking, it being the highest form of intelligence. Certainly Poe must have considered himself as having imaginative skills. Yet even with such skills he couldn't figure people out. What might the critical reader ponder after reading the story? Are people in general not unlike the man of the crowd?

Poe is a few years away from actually giving up on his audience entirely. He still has confidence that he might figure it out. "... while I followed him in the wildest amazement, resolved not to abandon a scrutiny in which I now felt an interest all absorbing" (654). Poe appears utterly amazed at the simplicity of people and another indication of his frustration can be seen. This frustration is the same feeling Poe created in the reader who earlier read "Ms. Found in a Bottle." "I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not" (654). Poe had yet to be noticed as a writer and his feelings about his larger audience are summed up in the first and last sentences of the story. Both sentences contain the German phrase, "er lasst sich nicht lessen" (it does not allow itself to be read). This phrase is rhetorical, at least in part, due to its location in the story. It

appears twice, in the opening and concluding sentences. It seems much more likely the reader would remember the first and last thing the narrator says, thereby allowing the reader to leave the story with their dominant impression being that people, their actions and beliefs are beyond comprehension.

Another rhetorical device employed by Poe is a direct address to the reader. "Now and then ,alas, the conscience of man takes up a burthen (sic) so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only to the grave" (647). By not telling the reader directly what this horrible burden is, the reader is left to imagine it. How Poe's characterization of the man of the crowd might affect the reader could be by allowing the reader to ponder the possibility of the German phrase that starts and ends the story.

Poe is now ready to try something new, tales of ratiocination. Such a change is strictly a defensive move on the part of Poe. He is hungry and the reality of his poverty is taking its toll. While these tales will prove to be more commercially successful, they sustain him only because he is still confident that ultimately there would be an audience he could reach. This audience would admittedly be small, but sufficient to sustain a periodical that he would edit, allowing him to demonstrate his talent to an audience who would demand superior literature and loath sensational Blackwoods journalism.

By the middle of Poe's career he is becoming painfully aware that demonstrating his ability is becoming an effort in futility; it is starting to frustrate him to the point that his behavior and writings might lead one to perceive him as mad. While aspects of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" such as the gruesome murders themselves may be an attempt to please the less erudite reader, Poe uses the opportunity to show what he feels about an audience that forces an

artist to write a story which is clearly in the Blackwoods style. The murders are not necessary. The orangutan could have just stolen any item and Dupin would still have a case to solve. Aside from the gruesome murder, the critical reader understands that it is Dupin's imagination that allows him to solve the case. Only Dupin can imagine the shutters fully open, allowing the murderer a possible entry and exit. The reader is shown how those with imagination overcome those who possess none.

One of the effects on the careful reader of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is a result, once again, of Poe's characterization. The molding of the belief that people are incapable of thought, thereby negating the norm that people are intelligent, already implanted, is reinforced. There are minor characters in the story and only when looking at how Poe portrays them can it be seen that Poe is no longer making light humor about people in general but is in fact trying to make them look stupid, thereby creating a feeling of superiority in his few critical readers.

Three of the several witnesses in the crowd who hear the screams during the murder are eventually seen by the reader as ridiculous. The first witness is an Englishman named William Bird who is certain he heard the voice of a Frenchman and distinctly heard the words "sacre" and "mon dieu" (666). Another witness, Alfonzo Garcia, a Spaniard, claims to have heard the gruff voice of a Frenchman and the shrill voice of an Englishman, yet does not understand English. Yet another witness, Alberto Montoni, thinks he heard the voice of a Russian, though he has never spoken with one.

This is beyond humorous; it is ludicrous. Imagine hearing two hysterical women being murdered by an enraged screaming orangutan and confusing the

sounds with a highly developed romance language! Would not the imaginative reader relate to such absurdity and hold such a character in contempt? The reader would also be able to imagine how embarrassing it would be to make such a claim and then discover the truth. Notice how Poe has the witnesses making a decision about a language they admit they know nothing about. Metaphorically, this works well with audiences deciding what will be printed and what is rejected. These “men of the crowd,” these readers whom Poe must write down to must appear contemptible to Poe.

My assertion that “The Murders in the Rue Morgue: is a glorified Blackwoods article and follows the degeneration of Poe’s humor is supported by a quote from the opening paragraph.

It cannot be doubted that the mental features discoursed of as the analytical are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. We appreciate them only in their effects. We know of them, among other things, that they are always to their possessor, when inordinately possessed, a source of the liveliest enjoyment. As the strong man exults in his action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which *disentangles*. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talent into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics: exhibiting in his solutions of each and all a small degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural. His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition. . . . yet to calculate is not in itself to analyze. (656)

Apparently, Poe is unimpressed with simple calculating. Poe prefaces the story by distinguishing what is profound from what is considered profound. He had already tried profundity. In a four month period in 1835 Poe wrote three tales: “Berenice” (March), “Lionizing” (May), and “Hans Phaall” (June). By definition, a tale is just a story. But Poe followed up these tales with two fables which have morals that can only be ascertained after thought. These fables are

"Shadow" and "Siope," both in 1835, and they are two of his least known works. Having had them ignored, he now intends to write what will be considered profound. "The Theory of Composition" ridicules such stories of simple profundity, the only kind palatable to the mass audience as defined by Poe.

While "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" may be, as some (Allen) have observed, an attempt to demonstrate genius to an intelligent audience, the presence of a sensational and unnecessary murder might indicate the story is a commercial attempt to make a profit. My feeling is Poe was probably unimpressed by it. Who else would leave blanks and use initials as if it were classified information? Unimaginative consumers of pulp need easy reading and this would break their flimsy concentration. Poe's lack of attention to detail is a clear indication of how difficult it was for him to write commercially. The story was designed to demonstrate acuity in a sensational manner, yet he cares so little about readability, he neglects to make up trivial details. The first meeting between the narrator and Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin occurs in Paris "... during the spring and part of the summer of 18-- , . . ." (658). Later, the narrator asks Dupin "How was it possible you should know I was thinking of _____?" (660). Again, when recalling an event, Dupin says "We had been talking of horses. . . just before leaving the Rue C____" (661). My impression is that the story is a rough draft and may have been an effort to write. While the story may be an attempt to please his larger audience, Poe's primary concern seems to have been to generate revenue for the starving artist.

The political career and disillusionment of Henry Clay has tremendous similarities and implications for the evaluation of the degeneration of Poe's

optimism that there existed an intelligent sector of the population. First elected in 1803, Clay was staunchly Jeffersonian in his belief that the intelligence and inherent fairness of the people (a norm Poe's fiction seems to impugn) would correct the evils of government (Eaton 86). As a young adult Poe must have been aware of the degeneration of the great democratic experiment. In 1838 Henry Clay said,

I confess that I have throughout life striven to think well of them (people), but the last 13 years (1825-38) have shaken my faith very much. I yet, however, believe the mass to be honest, although very liable to deception. (89)

Seemingly, the major flaw in Henry Clay was the same as that of Poe; Clay insisted on imposing reality on those who he simultaneously realized would refuse to accept it. "Clay's friends were afraid that he would express himself too freely . . . " (94).

While Poe was seemingly apolitical, there are simply too many of his stories which are concerned with the gullibility and stupidity of people (the same realization was occurring to Clay and other politicians), to be coincidence. Surely "The Man That Was Used Up" in August 1839 concerned the election of 1840. "The Whigs passed over their ablest man and outstanding leader (Clay) for an old gentleman (Harrison) whose chief claim to notice was a rather dubious military record years before" (142). "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too" was the slogan and the similarity to Kickapoo and Bugaboo, the tribes subdued in "The Man That Was Used Up" is, in light of Poe's fondness for satire through phonetic manipulation, difficult to write off as mere chance.

Only five months after the "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," which is in part a comment about his audience of popular taste, Poe shows what he thinks

of this audience in "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" in September 1841. The narrator recalls an old friend, Toby Dammit, whose tendency it seems is to end each statement with "I bet the devil my head." One day the devil appears on a bridge Toby and the narrator are crossing after hearing Toby claim to be able to leap a turnstile and ending the claim with his ubiquitous wager. Toby attempts the leap, falls short and is decapitated when, while falling, his neck strikes an iron support bar.

Prefacing the actual story, Poe addresses his audience directly. In the first few paragraphs Poe's direct address says, "Every fiction should have its moral . . . the critics have discovered that every fiction has" (Mossman 712). Apparently then, it is impossible to write shamelessly commercial pulp as long as there are critics to infer some meaning. The implication then is, that it is impossible to write something great as long as there are antagonistic critics to belittle it. This direct address might indicate to the imaginative reader that Poe is writing primarily for himself. After all, it would seem Poe feels many critics are not worthy of impressing. His reference to "certain ignoramuses" in the publishing world is hardly humorous; indeed, it shows contempt. The actual story shows the same contempt.

Toby's last name is only marginally changed from the phonetically exact "damn it". This phonetic manipulation is one of at least two items in the story that are rhetorical. On two occasions, when trying to convince Toby of his foolishness, our narrator says, "Dammit, what are you about? Don't you hear?" (718). The tone of the narrator's frustration seems to make itself clear and it also seems as if the narrator is speaking to the reader directly, and not to Toby. This direct address reads like a plea from the author to the imaginative reader to

once again engage their imaginations and feel what it is like to have to deal with the likes of Toby. "I really could not make up my mind whether to kick or to pity him" (719). This is precisely how Poe is now felling about most of his readers. Toby, like Poe's common readers, is so frustrating to have to deal with, that when the narrator is faced with a small debt incurred after burying his friend, he has no qualms about having Toby's remains "dug up and sold for dog's meat" (720) to pay the bill. This ending speaks volumes to the rare critical reader about Poe's attitude toward the overall reading public.

The moral of the story is simple. As the narrator says, "Mysteries force a man to think, and so injure his health" (715). Poe held that thought is not only tiresome and difficult for the average person, but actually dangerous. Poe ridicules people for not thinking because their inability to think is what prevents Poe from being acclaimed by the reading public. No purpose would be served to ponder if there is humor in the story or not. If one finds a leap ending in decapitation funny, so be it. Even if there is humor, it has now become dark, even tasteless. Tasteless humor is, after all, perfect for an audience with no taste. "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" is important because it continues to support the rhetorical affect on the reader. Poe portrays Toby as mindless, "His expressions on his head had no meaning attached to them whatever" (714). Such treatment of character continues to create in the reader a sense of superiority and identification with the frustration they feel when having to deal with a Toby of their own.

Toby dies because he can't imagine the consequences if he should fail to leap high enough. He is warned repeatedly by the narrator. Again the critical reader experiences a character unworthy of sympathy. Would not the critical

reader find it difficult to sympathize with someone who ignores several warnings to cease harmful behavior? Again it must be remembered what Booth says about a characteristic in real life that causes the reader to love or hate, working the same in fiction.

What may have a rhetorical effect on the reader is the symbol of Toby's head being severed. The few readers with an imagination could not help but assign a meaning to the symbol. Certainly Poe was counting on his few imaginative readers being affected by such an image. In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe says, "I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect" (1080). Couldn't it be possible that the meaning assigned to the decapitation, in light of Toby's behavior, is that without intelligence the body is just a corpse fit only to be used as dog meat? For the first time we see a description that is negative. Twice the narrator calls Toby a dog. I would hesitate to call this tasteless humor a trend, but it does appear again in another commentary about people in general, "The System of Dr. Tar and Professor Fether" in November 1844. But first, two other stories from this middle period must be considered, "The Tell Tale Heart," January 1843, and "The Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherezade", February 1844.

"The Tell Tale Heart" may have a sobering effect on the reader because of the norm Poe calls into question, that being that people need a reason to commit heinous crimes. While the dismembering of the old man may be a sensational concession to the popular audience, it is not necessary to convey an idea to the critical reader, an idea pondered when the reader contemplates the motive. "Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given one insult. For his gold I

had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this!" (799).

Certainly, most readers are aware of man's ability to take life. But is it not generally understood that when committing such horrible deeds, the criminal has something to gain as a result, be it money, power or revenge? "The Tell Tale Heart" negates this norm by having the protagonist kill for a cosmetic reason, or no reason actually. The effect on the imaginative readers is to make them wonder if people are capable of the most heinous crimes for no reason. And what might the critical reader think when Scherazade is murdered in Poe's next story, "The Thousand and Second Tale of Scherazade?"

Scheherezade proceeds to tell the true and complete tales of Sinbad. One encounter is with a large powered ship manned by robots.

. . . animals about the size and shape of men, and altogether much resembling them, except that they wore no garments . . . with an ugly uncomfortable covering . . . fitting so tight to the skin, as to render the poor wretches laughably awkward . . . it was quite impossible to move their heads without moving their bodies at the same time. (1016)

This monster ". . . was a cruel demon, with the bowels of sulphur and blood of fire, created as the means of inflicting misery upon mankind" (1017). My understanding of this story is that the prediction of robots may indicate Poe's expectation that the Industrial Revolution will make peasants, who had been necessary as a means of production, obsolete. The peasants, having no redeeming value except as a beast of burden, could then become only a burden to society, whether as a criminal, a diddler, or a politician. The monster explanation could be construed as a pre Dickensian Communist view that capitalism, the hated aristocracy of dollars, reduced the average standard of living while wealth was accumulated by a few diddlers who had graduated into entrepreneurs.

Scheherezade is condemned to death by her husband, the king, who refuses to believe her stories in spite of their truth. As long as Scheherazade lies to her husband, he is content. The critical reader is left to wonder if the revealer of truth, while being strangled by doctrine, must derive satisfaction from knowing that the ignorant will remain so. Poe is careful not to directly state this idea. As Bell says, To express a thought in language may be to kill it" (102). Poe survived by being able to derive this satisfaction, and when he was no longer able to do so, elected to die. What is also rhetorical about the story is the negation of the norm or social regulation that telling the truth is always best. The reader sees that Scheherazade dies because she spoke the truth. The king can not imagine the truth, the implication being that truth, often seen as profundity (Von Jung), can be disturbing, and people without imaginations are not ready for it.

After 13 years of few successes and much failure, "The System of Dr. Tar and Professor Fether" again shows the frustration of Poe in a tasteless and maybe self-gratifying way. Any humor at the expense of the mentally handicapped is indeed out of line, vulgar and crude. With the possible exception of "Thingum Bob," published only one month later, this is the end of the line of Poe's humor, light or dark.

While journeying through southern France, the narrator visits the Maison de Sante, a mad house. Initially unable to tell the inmates from the staff, he is horrified to eventually discover that the facility has been overthrown and the lunatics are in charge. One would not be completely wrong to see the story as a metaphor showing Poe's feelings about democracy. Poe felt it was a mistake and civilization was doomed because of it.

Consistent with Poe's assessment of people in general would be his belief that the intelligence level of the general population would not allow a democracy to succeed. The careful reader is aware that it is 1844 and the narrator's comments are a thinly disguised evaluation of the new American democratic experiment. When becoming aware that the lunatics are in charge, the narrator responds, "You don't tell me so! I never heard of anything so absurd in all my life!" Maillard responds,

Fact--it all came to pass by means of a stupid fellow-- a lunatic--who, by some means, had taken it into his head that he had invented a better system of government than any other heard of before-- a lunatic government, I mean. He wished to give his invention a trial, I suppose-- and so he persuaded the rest of his patients to join him in a conspiracy for the overthrow of the reigning powers. (945-6)

This same sense of despair about democracy is similarly expressed in "Some Words With a Mummy".

If the patients at the asylum think they are chickens, they are humored and fed corn and gravel; they are happy. In other words, tell the people what they want to hear, give them what they ask for, and they will be happy, not unlike the citizens of Vondervotteimittiss or most of the reading public.

Poe's attitude manifests itself most poignantly when the protagonist is dining with staff/inmates, and is told by the person he thinks to be Maillard, never to use the word lunacy. "... and the word 'lunacy' was never employed" (936). The simple fact of the matter is, the people at the asylum are lunatics and by censoring the word they are in fact censoring truth; there is no room for it. Poe conveys this idea through his characterization and his images because, as Booth says, the reader must be shown and not told, and as Bell says, expressing a thought in language may be to kill it. (Exposing the truth for years

about the inner workings of publishing companies often hurt Poe.) He felt he spoke the truth but few appreciated his version of it.

The music the inmates are playing is little more than noise pollution to the narrator.

These fellows annoyed me very much, at intervals, during the repast, by an indefinite variety of noises, which were intended for music, and which appeared to afford much entertainment to all present, with the exception of myself. (938)

Perhaps Poe's attitude about popular literature is metaphorically conveyed by this passage. Less than skillful writing is presented as artistic and the people love it and ask for more. A most revealing passage that suggests Poe was tired of this is in a direct address to the more erudite reader. The narrator says, again in reference to the inmates' pitiful attempt at music, "I had traveled so much as to be quite adept in the *nil admirari*" (938). Once again Poe presents characters who cannot recognize reality or truth and these characters are not likely to get sympathy from the critical reader.

Poe often referred to Bostonians as frogpudlians. Although Poe himself was born in Boston, he hated New England. But a nameless character in the story thinks himself a frog and maybe this character was inspired by some Bostonian with whom Poe had to deal. This assertion is certainly plausible when we see that the Boston born Poe is himself Hop Frog in a later story of the same name. It is no accident this patient thinks himself a frog as opposed to any other animal. Whoever this antagonist from Boston was who Poe had to deal with may be lost to time. But Poe's characterization will preserve Poe's attitude of him forever.

The narrator calls him,

. . . an ignoramus . . . who mistook himself for a frog, which, by the way,

he resembled in no little degree . . . it would not do your heart good to see the natural airs that he put on . . . and then again the frog man croaked as if the salvation of his soul depended upon every note that he uttered. (940)

Poe, now 35, knows for sure that in the literary world those unimaginative thinkers of popular taste are in charge and his voice will not be heard. At the conclusion of the story, the protagonist is trying to discuss business with Maillard at the party that is described as “pandemonium”. The room is too noisy for anyone to be heard. Poe is showing definite signs of giving up on his audience and in another direct address says, “A word spoken in an ordinary key stood no more chance of being heard than the voice of a fish at the bottom of Niagara Falls” (945). Poe’s attitude is summed up nicely in the narrator’s response to the fact that the lunatics and by implication the majority, are in charge. It is the same way Poe felt about the status quo of the big city literati. “You don’t tell me so! I never heard of something so absurd in all my life” (945).

This is the end of Poe’s middle period. He is now more angry than frustrated, but we must pause here to imagine what has been happening to the reader. What is the effect on the reader after imagining the protagonist listening to a room full of mental patients who are impressed with the noise they are creating, thinking it to be beautiful music while a few of them contemplate what end of the violin one is supposed to blow into? Because the inmates are getting adequate care, one can’t help but laugh at the absurdity of the situation. And how is the reader influenced by imagining the frustration of Dupin trying to get crucial information from witnesses incapable of discerning a blood curdling scream of an orangutan from a highly developed human language?

A certain bonding, built upon sympathy, is taking place between the

protagonists in the stories and the reader. It can be frightening to think, as Poe certainly must have been feeling, that these kinds of people, incapable of imagination, are everywhere, in the way actually, and in some kind of control of the destiny of the few thinking people of the world who are forced to deal with them. Poe felt it was nothing to laugh at, and I am suggesting that his frustration works its way into his stories and his rhetorical devices invite the imaginative reader to experience the frustration in the way described by Baudelaire.

Poe is now entering a time of deepening despair about mankind in general, especially about any kind of potential audience of imaginative thinkers large enough to support a magazine he owned and edited. Several Poe scholars such as Allen have asserted that Poe kept this dream alive to the very end of his life. They are wrong, and the evidence appears to me to be strong. In "Mellonta Tauta," (January 1848) Poe writes, "If you get this letter or not is a point of little importance, as I write for my own amusement" (1128). My interpretation of Poe's fiction leads me to believe that Poe realized the small yet imaginative audience who he at one time was sure existed, was not there at all.

The rhetorical effect of Poe's work is such that it has now taken the reader from seeing people as basically good, if not particularly bright, a belief molded or reinforced over eight years, to seeing people as something about which to be worried. Poe's middle work may leave the reader with the belief that people are their own biggest enemies, doomed to decay. There is no one in charge and the few intelligent members of the species are as heirless as the Ushers.

As we approach the end of Poe's career, we must pause to demonstrate that what Poe is doing, and what we are considering, is still consistent with the

views of Booth. Poe shows signs of giving up on his audience late in his career, but consideration for the reader is not necessary for the rhetorical techniques to continue affecting the reader. Booth writes:

Every literary work of any power--whether or not its author composed it with his audience in mind--is in fact an elaborate system of controls over the reader's involvement and detachment over various lines of interest. (123)

Poe started molding perceptions of people early in his career by portraying them as simple, harmless, naive citizens whose rituals and superstitions can be amusing to the observer capable of imagining the situations Poe puts his characters in.

The significant change in Poe's middle years is the fact that Poe's rhetoric often not only forbids the reader from feeling sympathy for his characters, but portrays these characters in demeaning ways. Booth recognizes this ability to manipulate feelings in a reader. "We can be made to have a strong desire for the success or failure of those we love or hate, admire or detest" (125). Poe has, by the middle of his career, molded a desire to expect, even hope for, the failure of certain characters. The few imaginative readers relate to Poe's protagonist and their images of fear, isolation, frustration and superiority that is felt when having to deal, in whatever capacity in their lives, with the likes of Poe's antagonists.

Would the imaginative reader sympathize with Toby Dammit after he is warned repeatedly about saying "I bet the devil my head," or with Herman, an arrogant fool, easily duped by a few words from Von Jung? I would suggest not. Soon we will see Fortunato, a character whose death comes only after the narrator has endured "a thousand injuries." Poe's treatment of character won't

allow the reader to feel sorry for his antagonists, and he does this by giving the antagonists certain traits universally despised such as arrogance, greed, vanity, and the characteristic Poe apparently could never learn to tolerate, the inability to imagine. As Booth says, "Any characteristic, mental or physical, or moral, which in real life will make me love or hate other men, will work the same effect in fiction" (130). This frustration worked itself into Poe in real life and then into much of his fiction. From there Poe's rhetorical devices move this frustration into the minds of his imaginative readers.

The degeneration of culture into popular culture, which had begun when a substantial portion of the population had been bestowed with the right to vote, or as Poe would say, "meddle with public affairs" (1124), had rendered poetry an ineffective mechanism for addressing an audience, or at least this was how Poe could rationalize the failure of his poetry. The consequent move to the short story format was a defensive move by Poe as was his move away from humor when it became apparent that few people appreciated his.

The retention of poetic romantic imagery in his original story, "Metzengerstein" shows that his perceptions and attitude about art had changed little if at all, and his persistent refusal to give up his prescribed short time period of reading for maximum effect, despite the relative success of "Pym" and "The Gold Bug" indicates that he never changed his purpose, but evolved his means of conveying his perception about people in general.

Poe's contemporaries, like Dickens and Shelley, recognized the existence of the degrading and uncontrollable Industrial Revolution, but Poe refused to give up his medieval imagery and insistence that humanity is the enemy, not the system. His first sentence of prose, "Horror and fatality have

been stalking abroad in all ages" (78), begins a pattern of dismissing details like time and place as irrelevant because the crucial aspects of the story are as old as mankind. Allowing the general public to decide who governs, or who gets published, was contrary to Poe's idealistic dreams which he kept until his death, unlike his belief in a literate audience able to understand and support a publication of his own.

In a letter to Mrs. Whitman in November 1848, less than a year before his death, Poe wrote that he dreams of "... the sole, unquestionable aristocracy, that of intellect, to secure its supremacy" (Harrison, Vol XVII, 317). He writes it would be glorious.

The events of 1844 to 1846 must have made Poe feel like giving up. He had watched his wife's health deteriorate rapidly during the year (she was to die in January of 1847); she was constantly near death and Poe's own health suffered also. As if helplessly watching Virginia die weren't enough, the attacks in the press from his enemies about Poe's character and ability must have seemed unending.

In January Poe is forced to resign as editor of "The Broadway Journal" and is once again unemployed. Apparently, what Poe perceived as truth, annoyed some critics. On January 6, a writer for The Richmond Compiler reports that Poe "is to annoy the public, or the small portion that reads his paper though his columns no longer" (Thomas, Dwight and Jackson 615). His character and reputation were being assassinated almost daily.

On January 14, Lewis Gaylord Clark wrote a hostile review in The Knickerbocker about "The Raven and Other Poems." Two months later, on March 14, William Jordan in The Literary Gazette did the same. That same

month, after learning that Charles Dickens had become associated with London's Daily News, Poe offers American correspondence but Dickens turns him down. On April 4, The Critic reviews "The Raven and Other Poems," and while admitting Poe had potential, calls the work imitative, apparently of the works of other well known poets. This must have infuriated Poe because he always felt imitation was a sure sign of mediocrity.

In addition to the many negative reviews, his enemies spread rumors that Poe had been sent to an insane asylum. On April 12, a St. Louis paper reports of his insanity and while the editor says he is sure the rumor is "altogether an invention" (Thomas, Dwight and Jackson 603), one must wonder then, why it was ever printed in the first place. A few days later, on April 18, Joseph Snodgrass repeats the same rumors in Saturday Visitor. By the end of April, Poe goes on the offensive with the first of several articles in Godey's Lady's Book about his opinions of the literary establishment of New York. Poe is vicious, calling Thomas Dunn English and Charles F. Briggs ignorant.

It is all-out war now between Poe and his audience of the "many", and his attitude of contempt manifests itself in his work. This despair was certainly present, although not viciously manifested by the time of "The System of Dr. Tar and Professor Fether," where Poe gives his opinion of the literary world, if not democracy also. Poe has now started to describe the public in derogatory terms. In "Mellonta Tauta" he refers to it as the "mob" (1125), and the "rabble" (1117), and in "The Landscape Garden" he calls the public the "herd" (1104). The mob is in charge and anarchy is the inevitable result. To tar and feather the king's tax collector was the traditional way for the rabble to refuse to support the status quo which preserves order. His contemporary, Dickens, deplored the

economic slavery necessary to support the British Empire, but Poe apparently considered the exploitation of the masses to support an artistic and intellectual elite as the only hope for the advancement of civilization. As early as "The Fall of the House of Usher" there is an indication that the Ancient Regime has decayed and is heirless and the new regime, MOB, provided no hope.

Chapter III

The Late Years

November 1846 -- March 1849

There are two reasons why 1846 is a good place to divide Poe's middle and late careers. Poe wrote three stories where the denouement of his antagonists could be considered vicious: "The Tell Tale Heart", where the old man is dismembered, "The Cask of Amontillado", where Fortunato is entombed and left to suffocate or starve, and "Hop Frog", where the king and his cohorts are hanged, covered with tar and set on fire. The two later stories appear during this late period, and the former misses by only three years, yet still occurs during the later half of Poe's career. As was mentioned earlier, the characteristics used to divide Poe's early, middle and late careers, at times overlap, but generally hold up to closer scrutiny. Certainly these stories indicate some kind of shift in Poe's attitude about his audience.

The other reason why 1846 marks the end of Poe's middle period is the fact that for the first time, Poe gives his readers two stories that have no antagonists, (which can be seen as a rhetorical device) "The Landscape Garden" and "Landor's Cottage".

The actual contempt Poe appears to have had is first seen in November 1846 with "The Cask of Amontillado". While this tale is often thought of as a horror story, this simple review is probably a result of the story being read out of context. After the events of 1846, the timeliness of "The Cask of Amontillado" could be seen as a scathing commentary about people and their inability to imagine. By this time in Poe's career, Poe held such people in contempt. Poe's frustration at having to deal with such people might be expressed in the opening line. "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge" (Mossman 1090).

The fate of Fortunato is quite possibly the fate Poe would like the reading

public who had judged him a failure, to meet. Poe is still doing a couple of things Booth says a true artist does. First, Poe is remaining true to his art by ignoring his audience. If, as several critics claim, this is a tale of horror, doesn't it seem logical that the fate of Fortunato would seem more horrible if he were innocent and undeserving of such a fate? Poe may be more interested in expressing his contempt for his critics and the reading public than pleasing them. Poe describes Fortunato as wearing a "... tightly fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surrounded by the conical cap and bells" (1091). If Poe was just concerned with conveying horror, the carnival season would not be necessary in the story's setting because it does nothing to make Fortunato's death more horrible than it is. The effect of the carnival season setting works in another way. It is the perfect setting for Poe to convey his opinion of his popular readers and people in general in a symbolic way. They are both figuratively and literally, clowns. This combination of characterization and symbolism is part of his rhetorical intent.

Fortunato's downfall is due to his vanity. He is unable to see what should be obvious, that which is right under his nose: the mason's tool, the skeleton, and the absence of servants in the house, just as the majority of the reading public was unable to see that his works were of a superior nature to the Blackwoods stories being published.

In the depths of the cavern Fortunato stood "stupidly bewildered" (1094). Like most of the reading public, the citizens of Vondervotteimittiss, Herman, Toby Dammit, the husband of Scheherazade, and the inmates of Maison de Sante, Fortunato doesn't have a clue as to what is going on. Once again Poe gives the reader a character who evokes little sympathy. Fortunato is vain,

arrogant and can't recognize the clues that, to the careful reader should be obvious, at least when seen as a whole. Poe's characterization would appear to negate the norm that man is aware of his surroundings and is able to understand his relationship to his environment. The reader should see that Fortunato's death is a direct result of his vanity and the careful and truly objective reader would understand that everyone has a touch of vanity, thereby coming to the possible conclusion that vanity is part of the normal make up of man. Such an awareness is what comes to the critical reader that Baudelere spoke of. ". . . an imprudent dose of Nature in the amalgam of faculties" (Baudelere 60).

Although Poe is said to have retained his dream of realizing a literate, intelligent and appreciative audience, "Mellonta Tuata", written before January 1848, might show this assertion to be erroneous. By now it appears this dream may be gone forever. In the opening paragraph he states, "When one has nothing to do, then it is time to correspond with one's friends" (1118), demonstrating his opinion of people as being unworthy of respect as social contacts. Apparently, dealing with people is something that is done only when one has nothing else to do. In the closing paragraph he writes, "I write altogether for my own amusement" (1129), demonstrating that people are unworthy of concern when composing. The intervening tirade against the foolishness of mankind is thoroughly consistent with his attitude of despair.

The fact that Poe was serious about writing for his own amusement can be seen by the lack of fastidiousness with which he clarified his logic. While lamenting the typical lack of vision and imagination of alleged experts he writes,

Really now it does seem to me quite unaccountable how anything so obviously feasible could have escaped the sagacity of the ancient savants. But in all ages the great obstacles to advancement in art have been opposed by the so called men of science. (1120)

For Poe's logic to have any continuity, he must have meant that the great obstacles have been presented by the men of science. For him to abandon his trademark of meticulously selecting each word to further a desired effect, he must obviously have assumed that he had no audience and was not afraid of the rebuke which would result from such negligence if anyone should carefully read the story, indicating that this perception of having no audience would seem to have included posterity.

Poe shows himself to be a true artist (at least according to the criteria mentioned by Booth) despite his ability to be ruthlessly rational when convenient by deploring accepted methods of reasoning as being more concerned with the road being traveled than where they are going. He cites the guesses of Kepler as an example of truth. While the scientific world greatly appreciates the talent and effort of Newton, his works proved and quantified Kepler's guesses but did not make them any more true. Poe was appalled by the reliance on convention that prevented imagination ("Devil in the Belfry") and here declares that science is the greatest hindrance to the improvement of man's thinking process.

Poe's life spanned the era of revolution in Europe, as the American revolution was being solidified, when the "mob" was, in his opinion, destroying civilization, leading him to sarcastically predict that the future would be "... an age so enlightened that no such thing as an individual is supposed to exist. It is the mass for which the true humanity cares" (1119). He repeatedly observes

the failure of man to learn from his mistakes with such observations as the one about the philosopher in the year 2848 A.D. who is,

... not so original in his views ... as his contemporaries are inclined to suppose ... the same ideas were put nearly in the same way, about 1000 years ago ... How very wonderfully do we see verified, every day, the profound observation of the Hindoo Aries Tottle (sic). This must say that, not once or twice, but, with almost infinite repetitions, the same opinions come around in a circle among men. (1119)

If Poe detects no improvement in man since the time of Aristotle, and envisions none for the next 1000 years, it would seem unlikely that he still retained hope of reaching or affecting anyone in his lifetime. He denigrates the conventional methods of logical thinking, Aristotelian and Baconian, as "... two preposterous paths--the one of creeping and the one of crawling--to which they have dared to confine the Soul that loves to soar" (1122).

If thousands of years of philosophy had failed to get past creeping and crawling, then it seems inescapable that Poe now considered himself the first man ever born who wasn't an idiot, and this of course precludes the notion that he still entertained hope of finding an intelligent audience. "... that a republican government could never be anything but a rascally one" (1125). His conviction that people were incapable of imaginative thinking, something necessary to participate in effective self government, was so firm that it led him to consider ridiculous any government of, by, and for the people.

"Mellonta Tauta" is significant because it shows the extreme degree to which Poe's attitude about people has changed. He now holds them in contempt. It takes only three sentences to refer to them as "the rabble"(1117). They are later referred to as "the mob", "dogs", and "vile" (1125). During the journey, the protagonist learns,

... Among other glorious news, that civil war is raging in Africa, while the plague is doing its good work beautifully both in Yurope and Ayesher. Is it not truly remarkable that, before the magnificent light shed upon philosophy by Humanity, the world was accustomed to regard War and Pestilence as calamities? Do you know that prayers were actually offered up in the ancient temples to the end that these *evils* (!) might not be visited upon mankind. (1119)

Poe's attitude about people leaves little need of explanation. Once again, one can assume Poe expected his careful readers to bring that imagination to the story and to use it. To appreciate the rhetorical effect on the critical reader, one must ponder what the careful reader imagines about the nature of man if the long accepted (and thought to be profound) ideas of Aristotle and Bacon are or may be useless, especially if they do indeed "confine the Soul that loves to soar."

What should get the attention of the careful reader is a rhetorical device already used by Poe, another direct address. The concluding sentence in "Mellonta Tauta" states, "Whether you ever get this letter or not is a point of little importance, as I write altogether for my own amusement" (1129). This is the first time Poe states directly that he is writing for no other audience and my guess is that the statement contains a bit of defensive hyperbole. And while Poe may still have been writing with the rhetorical intent of reaching a limited audience, certainly the critical reader would wonder why, all of a sudden, after fifteen years, this would happen. While the reason may not be evident just yet, the thought is nevertheless planted in the mind of the reader. After reading "The Landscape Garden" and "Landor's Cottage" the imagination of the readers should lead them to a possible and frightening conclusion.

"Hop Frog" may be the most vicious attack on his audience of all Poe's

works. It is one of the last stories he ever wrote and it is the epitome of his feelings of complete contempt and despair. The King and his seven ministers are probably the New York literary circle that had been at war with Poe over the last few years, a view supported by Hammond (103). Obviously the King is in charge, as is any editor, and "To tell a good story of the joke kind and to tell it well, was the surest road to his favors" (Mossman 1147). All people wanted were Blackwoods articles that would entertain and amuse. While at one time Poe demonstrated a wonderful sense of humor, it went largely unappreciated.

There should be little doubt as to the autobiographical nature of the story. Hop Frog is a dwarf; he is deformed, just as, in my opinion, Poe was deformed by being cursed with superior intelligence. Poe's abnormality was his belief in his superior intelligence and like Hop Frog, was ridiculed. How could Poe be writing about anyone else when he refers to Hop Frog as "Hop Frog, who although he made a good deal of sport, was no means popular . . . Hop Frog was not fond of wine; for it excited the poor cripple almost to madness; and madness is not a comfortable feeling" (1149).

Poe's descriptions of the King reveal his attitude about his critics. In the very first paragraph he refers to the king as "fat" and goes on to call him fat at least four times in the first half of the story. In addition to that, he twice calls the king a tyrant, once a joker, and the ministers "large corpulent, oily men" (1147). In the second to the last paragraph Poe writes what appears to be his warped fantasy. "The eight corpses swung in their chains, a fetid blackened, hideous and indistinguishable mass" (1155). Indistinguishable is a key modifier here. Perhaps Poe felt this way about all but a few of the New York literary circle. Editors from one paper were the same as from any paper; all that matters to

them is the profit to be made. Art meant nothing.

What is interesting is a concluding statement from Hop Frog that may be an indication that Poe has largely given up on trying to enlighten any part of his audience. "As for myself, I am simply Hop Frog, the jester and *this is my last jest* (1154). By italicizing the end of this statement, the effect is to draw attention to it and making the reader wonder if this is a direct address and if so, what does it mean. The fact that "Hop Frog" was written in March 1849, only months before Poe's death might lead one to believe it is a sign of the author coming to the conclusion that trying to enlighten has become an effort in futility.

Poe now realizes that at this point in his career, people are hardly worth commenting on, and his despair has brought him to the brink of madness. Perhaps as an attempt to maintain his sanity, Poe interrupts his attacks on mankind with a couple of stories about botanical fantasies, devoid of antagonists altogether, "The Landscape Garden", written in 1847, and "Landor's Cottage", published in 1849. This lack of any antagonist is where the rhetorical effect on the reader is to be found. After fifteen years and many stories, many with vain and arrogant antagonists, the lack of any such characters would be conspicuous, leading the imaginative reader to wonder why. Poe never tells the reader what has been eliminated to create the perfect garden; he shows them. While the less erudite readers may assume he is referring to undesirable foliage, the careful reader is led to see that what has been eliminated is people. It appears that Poe feels beauty and truth are wherever people are not. I suggest this is a possible conclusion the critical reader would at least think about if not accept. Both of these stories, combined with the fact that Poe returned to writing poems (the last three items he wrote

were poems) would seem to indicate Poe had finally given up on his audience altogether and wrote only for himself.

While "The Landscape Garden" deals with the beauty of nature and the pursuit of happiness, Poe's pessimism about man's future is still evident. "I believe the world has never seen. . . the world will never see, that full extent of triumphant execution, in the richer domains of art, of which the human nature is absolutely capable" (1100). He goes on to say the beauty of the garden is not due so much to the creation of something special as much as the elimination of that which is defective, "That the true result of the natural style of gardening is seen in the absence of all defects . . . a proposition better suited to the groveling herd than to the fervid dreams of the man of genius" (1104).

Through the character Mr. Ellison and his three conditions for bliss, Poe claims at this point in his career that one of the conditions for bliss is " . . . the contempt for ambition" (1098). Could the careful reader at least wonder if there is, after all, no one worthy of impressing?

In the opening sentence of "Landors Cottage", Poe seems to be facing the realization of the futility of his trying to impress the public when he writes, "I found myself somewhat embarrassed about the road I was traveling" (1136). This comment, only a few months before his death, could be seen as a comment about his career, and the potential audience upon whom he had given up. In the final paragraph Poe writes that the purpose of the story is to give a detailed picture of Mr. Landor's cottage, "*as I found it* . . . how he made it what it was and *why*" (1146). But there is no real explanation as to why. The reader must come to some sort of conclusion on their own. Because "Landor's Cottage" and "The Landscape Garden" are the only stories without antagonists,

this characteristic would seem conspicuous, thereby allowing the reader to consider them together. The imaginative reader could not help but at least ponder the potentially alarming possibility that the presence of people is what has turned that which might be considered beauty into something repulsive.

One may now begin to appreciate the complete rhetorical effect of his work. Poe molded beliefs in his readers early in his career with light humor, possibly coercing his readers to view people in a humorous, yet forgiving way. By the end he demonstrates that people are not worthy of sympathy by creating characters for whom the reader can muster no sympathy. Poe's never ending references to people evolve from the neutral "citizens, crowd and assembly" in "Hans Phaall" to the scathing "mob, vermin, rabble and herd" in "Mellonta Tauta". My feeling is that an imaginative reader could be persuaded by Poe's rhetorical devices to change from feeling optimistic and hopeful about the future of man to a feeling of pessimism and despair because as Booth says, "We have, or can be made to have a strong desire for the success or failure of those we love or hate, admire or detest" (125).

Conclusion

At the beginning of Poe's career, he idealistically wrote to his own intelligence level. Eventually he concluded that artists had to eat and this would be done honorably. Poe's positive review of "Peter Snook" shows he found nothing inherently deplorable about writing commercially, and he made a gesture at commercialism in 1837 with "Pym." For a short while after, he continued to attempt to derive pleasure from being superior to a humorous degree. By the time Poe wrote "The Fall of the House of Usher" he was unable to find anything humorous about the future of mankind. This depression would haunt him the rest of his life.

This depression was clearly related to contemporary political events. The first commoner elected president, Andrew Jackson, took office in 1829. The bitter prognostications contained in "Mellonta Tauta" could easily be a result of the fact that virtually every election in Poe's adult life was won by an inferior candidate who used sensationalism and avoided substance. Coonskins, log cabins and hard cider were apparently more important issues to the public, even the reading public, than economic policy, slavery and expansionism.

Another French revolution had made it clear that, being reincarnated like a Poe heroine in 1815, the Ancient Regime was as heirless as the Ushers. Poe's awakening to the implications of this would not have been more horrible than his realization at the end of "Morella", and his fertile mind conjured a personal "Night of the Living Dead". Those of popular taste, the many, were proceeding, as mindless and inexorable corpses, to infest and breed decay of higher thinking. Whether gaining power through violence as in Europe, or

through legislation, as in America, those without imaginative thinking skills were everywhere, refusing to stay where they had been buried. Poe was pessimistic about any form of government being able to improve conditions enough to cultivate minds. He saw that future governments would be of the people, and his evaluation of the people's intelligence permitted no hope.

The realization of not having an audience to write for created a frustrated, alienated, cynical, certainly elitist and eventually humorless Poe whose feelings manifested themselves through so many of his protagonists and into the imaginations of his careful readers.

A major concern of Poe, the writer, was to have a desired affect on the reader. In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe says, "I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect" (1080). Since having an effect on the reader was Poe's primary consideration when composing, and considered it "immensely important" (1081), Poe must have been aware of what his critical readers would feel after relating to the situations Poe's narrators find themselves in. All too often, Poe's narrators must deal with the likes of Toby Dammit, Herman, Fortunato, the King in "Hop Frog", or the citizens of Vondervottimittis. The critical reader recognizes that these character's denouements, often horrible ones, are a result of their inability to imagine. Toby Dammit can't seem to imagine how easily an accident can happen or what the consequences might be. Herman can't imagine he might ever come across someone who has actually read a book about dueling, and Fortunato can't seem to understand why there are no servants home. The king can't imagine how Hop Frog, the subject of much abuse, would seek revenge. And the citizens of Vondervottimittis can't imagine anything.

At the same time, the critical reader sees that, often times, Poe's narrators prevail because of their ability to imagine. Dupin imagines the position of the shutter if it were open, a vital clue, and goes on to solve the case. Von Jung is able to imagine how a phony like Herman will react, allowing Von Jung to make Herman look foolish. The critical reader also sees the narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum" survive because he can imagine the rats eating away his bandages if he rubs them with food, allowing his escape. The effect of such characterization, along with the other rhetorical devices employed by Poe, such as his phonetic manipulation, the use of metaphors, symbols and direct addresses, affects readers in such a way that, as Baudelaire said, ". . . takes the reader by surprise" and ". . . [are] constrained to follow the author through his compelling deductions" (Baudelaire 60).

This process of persuasion or influence is a result of Poe repeatedly reinforcing a feeling of superiority in the reader who imagines. These devices could influence a reader to identify with the superior persona he presents, inviting his readers to understand, if not embrace, Poe's assessment of people in general.

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